

YEARS OF CHILDHOOD

BY

SERGHEI AKSAKOFF

Translated from the Russian by

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-SERGHEI AKSAKOFF

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INTRODUCTION

FEODOR AKHAKOFF, the author of this autobiography, was born at Ufa, in the district of Orenburg, on 20 September 1791; he died at Moscow, after a long and painful illness, on 30 April 1859.

The introduction to *A Russian Gentleman*, already published in this series, gives some account of Akhskoff's life and writings. *Years of Childhood* was his last book: it was written in 1857 and published in the following year.

Not many of his letters have been published. One of these, written on 3 May 1857, and addressed to Maximovitch, a professor at Moscow University, runs as follows:

'I am finishing a big book. It is intended to be an artistic reproduction of my childhood from my third to my tenth year. It begins with scattered recollections which are followed by a full and detailed narrative. Part of it I have read to friends; and they assure me it is the best thing I have written. I think this myself of some parts; but I am not quite sure of the worth of the whole work, and I am quite sure that it cannot prove in general as interesting as *Family History*¹ and *Recollections*.² The life of a child will not be understood by every one, and the detail of the narrative will seem to many trivial and worthless.'

Now that sixty-five years have passed since this letter was written, it appears that Akhskoff and his

¹ *A Russian Gentleman*.

² *A Russian Schoolboy*.

friends were both right. It is true that in Russia this work has never been so widely popular as *A Russian Gentleman* ; and yet it is surely a still more astonishing performance. So far as I know, no literature contains such a record of a child's life and a child's mind. Though Aksákoff, when he wrote it, was old and racked by the pains of coming death, yet the record of that early time is neither coloured by the lapse of sixty years, nor clouded by the circumstances in which it was written. He was himself the possessor of that magical crystal mirror, which he tells of in his story of *The Scarlet Flower*.

This translation, the only translation (as I believe) that has ever been published, was made from the eighth Russian edition published at Moscow in 1906. It appeared first in 1915, and has been out of print for some years. I have taken advantage of this reprint to correct some mistakes.

J. D. DUFF.

25 January 1923.

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peasant's wife and lived thirty versts¹ away ; she used to start from her village on foot on Saturday evening and reach Ufá on Sunday morning ; when she had had her sight of me and rested, she started off again on foot to her village of Kasimofka, to be in time to work for her master. I remember she once brought with her—perhaps she got a lift on that occasion—my foster-sister, a healthy, red-cheeked little girl.

My little sister I loved at first more than all my toys, more than my mother ; and this love took the form of a constant desire to see her, and a feeling of pity for her : I always fancied that she was cold or hungry and in want of food, and I wished constantly to give her my food and dress her in my clothes ; of course, I was not allowed to do this, and that made me cry.

The constant presence of my mother is part of every recollection I have. Her image makes an inseparable part of my own existence, and therefore it is not prominent in the scattered pictures of my earliest childhood, although invariably a part of them.

Next follows a long interval, that is, a dark spot or faded place on my picture of the past ; and when my recollection begins again, I am very ill, and not at the beginning of the illness which lasted more than eighteen months, nor at the end of it when I was on the way to recovery : the precise point of recollection is a state of such weakness, that my life was in danger every moment. Once in the early morning I woke, or became conscious, and could not recognize where I was. All was unfamiliar—the large lofty room, the bare walls

¹ Twenty miles : a verst is $\frac{2}{3}$ of a mile.

of fir planks, new and very thick the strong smell of resin. The sun a summer sun apparently was just rising and, as it shone through a window on my right above a thin canopy spread over me was brightly reflected on the opposite wall. Near me was my mother sleeping unawake in her clothes and with no pillow. Even now I seem to see her black hair straying in disorder over her pale thin face. I had been brought the day before to the village of Zolotka, ten versts from Lsa. The journey and the sound sleep due to exercise had evidently given me strength, so that for some minutes I looked through the curtains with satisfaction and curiosity at the new objects around me. Not wise enough to let my poor mother sleep on, I touched her and said 'How bright the sun is! What a good smell!' My mother sprang up, frightened at first; but when she heard the strength of my voice and saw the freshness of my face, fear gave place to joy. How she caressed me and called me by fond names and wept for joy! Such things cannot be told in words. My canopy was removed, I asked for food, and food was given me, with half a glass of the old Rhine-wine which was supposed to be of sovereign efficacy in restoring my health. The wine was poured out of an odd kind of bottle with a long thin neck and wide flat bottom; I have never seen bottles like them since. Then I begged successfully for little bits or drops of the fir resin which was everywhere on the walls and window-frames, melting and dropping and making little streams, cooling and drying as it went, and hanging in the air like little icicles, with a shape exactly like the common icicles of winter. I was very fond of the smell of resin, which was

sometimes used to fumigate our nursery. I smelt the sweet transparent blobs of resin, admired them and played with them ; they melted in my hands and made my long thin fingers sticky ; then my mother washed and dried my hands, and I began to doze. Visible objects became confused before me : I thought that we were driving, and that I refused to take some medicine which was offered me, and that the figure beside me was not my mother, but my nurse Agatha or my foster-mother. . . . How I went to sleep, and what happened afterwards, I have quite forgotten.

I remember myself constantly in a carriage ; and the carriage was not always in motion, nor had it always horses in it. I have a clear recollection of sitting, dressed very warmly, in my mother's or my nurse's arms, while the carriage we sat in was standing in the cart-shed or sometimes drawn out into the yard ; I am wailing and saying, 'Soup, soup,' again and again in a feeble voice ; of the soup I got only a little at a time, in spite of the morbid hunger which at times tormented me and took the place of utter aversion to food. I have been told that in a carriage I cried less and was in general much quieter. I believe that the doctors made mistakes at first in their treatment of my illness ; they went on dosing me till my digestive organs were completely enfeebled, and I nearly died. Perhaps the excessive anxiety of a mother's love and the constant change of remedies were the cause of the desperate condition in which I found myself.

Sometimes I lay unconscious, in a sort of middle state between sleep and fainting, my pulse almost stopped, my breathing so weak that a mirror was placed to my lips to ascertain if I was alive ; yet

I remember much that was done to me at that time and said by those around me who supposed that I could no longer see or hear or understand that I was dying. The doctors and all around me had long ago sentenced me to death, the doctor judging from infallible symptoms and the rest from infallible signs, but the falsity of both was very convincingly shown in my case. My mother's sufferings it is impossible to describe, but her passionate presence of mind and her hope to save her child never left her. More than once I heard Anne Chepurzoff, her distant relation and devoted friend, say to her 'Selsa Nikoláyevna, my darling, cease to torment your child, have not the doctors and the priest told you that he is not for this life? Submit to God's will, place the child under the ikons,¹ light a candle, and suffer his innocent soul to depart in peace out of his body. You are only hindering and troubling it without doing any good.' But such speeches my mother always met with anger—she replied that while there was a single spark of life in me, she would not cease to do all she could to save me. Once again she bathed my lifeless body in some invigorating fluid, or poured Rhine-wine or chicken-soup into my mouth, or rubbed my back and chest for whole hours with her bare hands, and if this was of no avail, she inflated my lungs with her own breath—and I, after a deep sigh, would begin to breathe more strongly and wake up, as it were, to life; I became conscious and began to take food and speak, and even to get better for a time. This happened more than once. I could even amuse myself with my

¹ Sacred pictures kept in a case hanging on the wall of a room.

toys which were placed on a little table near me ; of course I was lying in my crib all the time, for I could scarcely move a finger. But my chief satisfaction was when my little sister was brought to me and I was allowed to kiss her and stroke her head , and then her nurse sat opposite me holding her, while I looked long at the child and pointed to one or another of my toys and asked that they should be given to my sister.

When my mother noticed that movement seemed to do me good, she drove with me constantly either to the estates of her brothers near Ufa, or to those of our friends. Once we took a long journey, I do not know where ; my father was with us. On the way, rather early in the morning, I felt so ill and grew so weak that it was necessary to stop ; I was taken out of the carriage, and bedding was spread for me in the high grass of a forest ride, under the shade of the trees , and there I was laid almost lifeless. I saw and understood all that went on around me. I heard how my father in tears tried to console my mother's despair, how fervently she prayed, raising her hands to heaven. I heard all and saw all clearly, but I could not say a single word, or even move—when suddenly I woke, as it were, and felt better and stronger than usual. The forest, the shade, the flowers, the fragrant air, pleased me so much that I begged not to be moved ; and we actually stayed there till evening. The horses were unharnessed and put to graze near me ; and I enjoyed that. A spring was found somewhere near, and I heard the talk about this ; a fire was kindled and tea was drunk, while I was given my horrible camomile to drink in Rhine-wine. Then dinner was prepared and eaten, after which all

rested, even my mother slept long. I did not sleep, but I felt an unaccustomed vigour and a kind of internal satisfaction and peace, or rather without understanding my own feelings, I was happy. Rather late in the evening, in spite of my prayers and tears, I was placed in the carriage and taken a short distance to a Tartar village on our road, where we spent the night. Next morning, I still felt fresher and better than my wont. When we returned to the town, my mother saw that I had gained a little strength, she reflected that for a week past I had not taken the usual mixtures and powders, so, after prayer to God, she determined to give up the doctors of the town, and took in hand to treat me herself according to Buchan's *Domestic Medicine*.¹ I became hourly better, and within a few months I was almost well. But all the time between our picnic in the forest ride and my actual recovery is an almost complete blank in my memory. One event, however, I remember clearly enough, which happened, as I am assured, in the very middle of my recovery.

When I began to recover, my feelings of pity for all suffering became morbid and excessive. The first object of this feeling was my little sister: I could not bear to see her tears nor hear her cry without beginning at once to cry myself; she too was unwell at that time. At first my mother had the child taken to another room; but when I

¹ William Buchan, a native of Roxburghshire and educated at Edinburgh, published his *Domestic Medicine* in 1769. It was soon translated into Russian, as well as other languages; and the Empress Catherine sent a gold medal to the author; he died in 1805. Readers of *Little Dorrit* will remember that Mrs. Tickit's favourite volume was Buchan's *Domestic Medicine*.

noticed this, my excitement and distress (as I was afterwards told) were such that the child was hastily brought back. Recovery was slow, and it was long before I could walk. I lay whole days in my crib with my sister beside me, amusing her with different toys or by showing her pictures. Our toys were of the simplest—small smooth bricks or pieces of wood, for which we had names of our own. Out of these I made a sort of dungeon, and my companion took delight in knocking it to pieces with a movement of her little arm. Later I began to creep about and to sit at the window which opened directly on the garden. Birds of all kinds, even sparrows, were a great attraction and pleasure to me. My mother, who spent with me all the time she could spare from social duties and household cares, at once got me a cage and a pair of tame pigeons, which passed their nights under my crib. I have been told that my enchantment with my pets was so great and expressed in such a manner, that it was impossible not to be affected by the sight of my joy. Once I was sitting at the window (from that moment my clear remembrance of things dates) when I heard a strange pitiful cry in the garden; my mother heard it too; and when I began to beg that some one should be sent to see who was crying—‘surely some one is hurt’—she dispatched a maid who after a few minutes brought us in her joined hands a tiny puppy, still blind. Trembling all over, tottering on its crooked legs, and poking its head in all directions, it whined pitifully. I was so sorry for the puppy that I took him and wrapped him up in my frock. My mother had warm milk brought in a saucer, and after many trials taught him to lap by pushing his

blind face into the milk. From that time, for whole hours, the puppy and I were inseparable, to feed him several times a day was my chief amusement. He was called 'Soorka',¹ and grew to be a smallish beast of the watch-dog kind. He lived sixteen years with us, not in the house, naturally, but in the court, and always kept a special attachment for me and my mother.

My recovery was considered to be a miracle: this even the doctors admitted. My mother attributed it, in the first place, to the infinite mercy of God, and next, to Buchan's *Domestic Medicine*. Buchan was called my preserver, and my mother taught me in infancy to pray to God for his soul's rest in my morning and evening prayer. Later, she got from somewhere an engraved portrait of Buchan; and four verses printed beneath the portrait were translated by some one from French into Russian, written out fair on paper, and gummed on the top of the French verses. But this, I regret to say, has long been lost beyond recall.

I attribute my recovery (apart from the first cause mentioned above, without which nothing could have been done) to my mother's sleepless care, unwearying protection, and infinite watchfulness, and also to travel, by which I mean movement and air. Here is a specimen of her watchful care: though she was constantly in need of money and had to look twice at a shilling, she regularly got me old Rhine-wine from Kazan, 500 versts away, through an old friend of her father—Dr. Reislein was his name, I think; the price of the wine was then excessively high, and I drank it several times a day, though little at a time. Again,

¹ i. e. Marmot.

the town of Ufa did not then provide the white loaves called French bread, so once a week, i. e. by each post, the post-rider, who was liberally rewarded, brought us three white loaves, also from Kazan. These facts are merely instances of her general system. My mother would not allow the flickering flame of life in me to be quenched : the moment it began to sink, she fed it with the magnetic infusion of her own life and her own breath. Whether she had read of this in some book or heard of it from a doctor, I do not know. The marvellous effect of travel upon health is beyond all doubt. I know many people who have recovered health in this way when they were given up by their doctors. I believe also that the twelve hours during which I lay on the grass in the woodland ride gave the first impulse in the right direction to my enfeebled frame. More than once I have heard my mother say that from that very time there began a trifling change for the better.

CHAPTER II

CONSECUTIVE RECOLLECTIONS

AFTER my recovery I begin to remember myself as a child, not sturdy and mischievous, as I afterwards became, but gentle, quiet, full of pity for suffering, a great coward, and at that time reading constantly, though slowly, a child's book with pictures, called *The Mirror of Virtue*. How I learnt to read and when, who taught me, and by what system—I have no idea ; the art of writing was acquired much later, and the process was very long and slow. We lived then in the city of Ufa, the capital of the Government, and occupied the large wooden house of my mother's family, which my father had bought, as I learnt later, at auction for 300 roubles. The outside boards of our house were not painted ; rains had darkened it, and the great pile had a very mournful appearance. The house stood on a slope, so that the windows towards the garden were very near the ground, but the dining-room windows on the opposite side of the house, which looked on to the street, were raised seven feet above the soil. More than twenty-five steps led up to the front door ; and from it nearly the whole breadth of the river Byélaya¹ could be seen. The two nurseries in which I and my sister lived were painted light blue over the plaster ; they were near my mother's bedroom, and looked out into the garden ; and the raspberries planted below grew so tall that the canes peeped in at us

¹ i. e. the White River.

through the window, which was a great comfort to me and my inseparable companion, my little sister. The garden, though fairly large, was not pretty : here and there currant-bushes grew and gooseberries and barberries and a score of stunted apple-trees ; there were round flower-beds with marigolds, crocuses, and asters, but not one large tree and no shade. Still even this garden gave pleasure to us, and especially to my sister who knew nothing of hills, fields, and forests ; but my travels had extended (so I was told) to 500 versets, and in spite of my feeble health the greatness and beauty of God's world had made a secret impression on my childish heart, which lived on, without my knowing it, in my imagination : our poor town garden could not satisfy me, and I often described to my sister different wonders which such an old traveller as I had witnessed ; and she listened with curiosity, fixing her pretty eyes full of rapt attention on me, while their expression clearly said, ' Brother, I don't understand a word.' Nor was that surprising, as the narrator was just five years old, and the listener three.

I have said before that I was timid and even cowardly. Perhaps long and severe illness had weakened my nerves and refined them to an excess of sensibility ; perhaps nature had not given me courage. My first feelings of terror were due to my nurse's stories. Her chief business was with my sister, but she had to keep an eye on me too. Though strictly forbidden by my mother even to talk to me, she managed from time to time to communicate to me some information about bogies and brownies and ghosts. I began to fear the dark at night, and dark rooms even by day. Our

house contained a very large parlour, from which two doors led into a pair of smaller rooms, both rather dark, because their windows looked out into a long entrance-hall which served as a passage. One of these rooms was used as a pantry, but the other was closed, it had been used as a study by my grandfather in his lifetime, and all his things were collected there—a writing-table, an arm-chair, a bookcase, and so on. Nurse told me that my grandfather was sometimes seen there, sitting at the table and putting papers in order. I was so terrified of this room that I always shut my eyes in passing it. Once I was walking along the entrance-hall, when I forgot and looked in at the study window. The nurse's gossip came back to me, and I thought I saw an old man in a white dressing-gown sitting at the table. I screamed out and fainted away. My mother was out of the house. When she returned and I told her of all that had happened, and of what I had heard from the nurse, she was very angry: she ordered the study to be opened, forced me to go with her though I shook with fear, and showed me that there was no one there, only some linen hanging on the back of the chair. She made every effort to convince me that all such tales were nonsense and mere inventions of ignorance and stupidity. She drove the nurse from her and would not allow her to enter our nursery for some days, till necessity compelled her to summon back the same woman and put her in charge of us again. Of course, she was strictly forbidden to talk such nonsense, and even forced to swear that she would never speak to us of popular superstitions. But this did not cure me of my fears. Nurse was a strange old woman. She was

very devoted to us ; and my sister and I both loved her dearly. When banished to the servants' quarters and forbidden even to enter the house, she managed to creep to our room at night, and kissed us in our sleep and cried over us. This I saw myself, as I was once awakened by her caresses. She tended us very zealously ; but her ignorance and obstinacy were so confirmed that she did not understand my mother's requirements, and secretly set them at defiance. A year later she was finally sent off to the country. I mourned her long : I could not understand why 'mamma' was so often angry with 'kind nana', and I remained convinced that my mother simply disliked her.

Every day I read my one book, *The Mirror of Virtue*, aloud to my little sister, without an inkling of the fact that she was too young to understand anything except the pleasure of looking at the pictures. This child's book I knew then by heart from end to end ; but now, out of a full hundred stories, only two remain in my memory, and two pictures, though there was nothing to distinguish these from the others. They were 'The Grateful Lion' and 'The Boy Dressing Himself'. I remember even the expression on the faces of the lion and the boy ! At last *The Mirror of Virtue* ceased to absorb my attention and satisfy my childish curiosity—I wanted to read other books, but found it impossible to get them ; those which my father and mother read sometimes I was not allowed to read. I made an attempt on Buchan's *Domestic Medicine*, but for some reason my mother considered this reading unsuitable to my age ; she selected, however, some passages which she marked with parentheses and let me read. And this was

really interesting reading; for it contained descriptions of all the herbs and salts and roots which are *only alluded to in the body of the work*. At a much more advanced age I read these descriptions over again, and always with satisfaction, because the whole subject is set forth and translated into Russian very sensibly and well.

The kindness of fortune soon sent me a new and unexpected pleasure, which produced a very strong impression on me and greatly extended the circle of my ideas. Opposite to our house, in a house of his own, lived M. Anitchkoff, a rich old bachelor, who had the reputation of a very clever and even learned man. This belief was confirmed by the fact that he had been sent as representative of Orenburg to serve on the famous Commission, which Catherine II brought together to revise the existing laws. Anitchkoff was very proud—so I was told—of this distinction, and often talked with confidence of what he had said and done, though he admitted himself that the Commission had been a failure. He was not popular, but he was respected; and his sharp tongue and unbending temper were even feared. To my parents he was well disposed, and even lent them money at times, though no one else dared to borrow of him. Somehow he had heard from my parents that I was an intelligent boy with a great love of reading, but with nothing to read. The old Commissioner, being more enlightened than his neighbours, was the natural patron of all seekers after knowledge. Next day he sent his servant to fetch me; but my father took me there himself. Anitchkoff made full inquiries: What had I read? how far did I understand what I read? what did I remember?

Much pleased with the answers, he ordered a bundle of books to be brought, and presented them to me. Oh, joy! It was *Reading for Children to benefit the Heart and Head*, by N. I. Novikoff, given away as a supplement to a Moscow newspaper. I was so delighted that I threw myself, almost weeping, into the old man's arms, and then sprang up in my excitement and ran home, leaving my father to converse with Anitchkoff. I remember, however, the friendly and approving laugh of my host, which rang in my ears and gradually died away as I got farther off. Fearing that some one might rob me of my treasure, I ran straight through the hall into the nursery, lay down on my bed, drew the curtains, opened the first volume, and at once forgot all my surroundings. When my father returned and laughingly told my mother what had happened in our friend's house, she was much alarmed, as she did not know of my return. I was looked for and found lying on my bed, book in hand. My mother told me afterwards that I behaved just as if I were insane: I could not speak or understand what was said to me, and refused to come to dinner. It was necessary to take the book from me in spite of my bitter tears. The threat that I should never see my books again forced me to dry my tears and get up and even eat my dinner. Dinner done, I clutched my book again and read till evening. My mother naturally put an end to such excessive reading: she locked away the books and let me have one at a time at regular hours fixed by her. There were twelve of the little books, which were odd volumes out of the twenty of which *Reading for Children* is composed. I read my books with passionate interest,

But when the danger was past, all her energies began to flag, and her strength failed her. She had pain in the breast and side; and then fever set in. The same doctors, who had treated me with so little success and whom she had given up, took her treatment in hand. Once I heard her say to my father that she was in the early stages of consumption. How far this was true, I do not know; for the patient was said by all to be very despondent about herself; and I do not know whether my father and the doctors were speaking the truth or not, when they assured her she was mistaken. I dimly understood already that 'consumption' was some terrible disease. My heart grew cold with fear, and the thought that my mother's illness was due to me was a constant torture. Then came grief and tears on my part; but my mother found means to shake my belief and quiet me. Nor was this difficult, because she could do with me exactly as she wished.

Not feeling complete confidence in the skill of the doctors at Ufa, my mother decided to travel to Orenburg to consult a Dr Deobolt, who practised there and was famous over all the country for his marvellous cures of desperate cases. She told me this herself with a cheerful face, and assured me that she would come back well. I believed her absolutely: my fears vanished, my heart grew light, and I began to press my mother to start at once. But money was needed for the journey; and besides there were two little children: how were they to be disposed of, and who was to look after them? Constant discussion on these points went on in my hearing between my father and mother. At last I learnt that the matter was

arranged. Money was provided by my benefactor in the matter of the books ; while it was decided that the children, i. e. my sister and I, should be taken to Bagrovo,¹ and left there with their grandparents. I was much pleased when I learnt that we should travel all the way in our own carriage, and have our meals out of doors. Of the way I treasured a dim but very pleasant recollection ; my father was very fond of it, and his stories of it and, still more, of Bagrovo promised me a host of new and unknown pleasures, and inflamed my childish imagination. I was anxious, too, to see my grandfather and grandmother. Though I had seen them already, I could not remember it : I was only eight months old at my first visit to Bagrovo ; but my mother often told me that my grandfather had liked having us, and had long ago asked us back, and was even angry that for four years we had not been there once. This was due to my long illness and slow recovery, and then to my mother's bad health. My father, indeed, had travelled to Bagrovo the year before, but only for a very short stay. It was my habit—a habit inherent in my nature—to share my impressions with others ; so I talked about all my pleasant hopes and dreams to my little sister, and tried to explain them first to her, and then to all the household. Our packing began. I was first in the field, and packed up my books, that is, *Reading for Children* and *The Mirror of Virtue*, though I had not even glanced at the latter for a long time ; nor did I forget my bricks, which my sister was to play with as well as I. Two volumes of *Reading for*

¹ A pseudonym for Aksakovo, which still belongs to the family.

Children which I had read through thrice already, I left out for the journey. Then off I ran with beaming face to tell my mother that I was ready to start, and only sorry to leave Soorka behind. My mother was sitting in an arm-chair, with a sad look on her face. Though tired out by the packing, she refused to leave her place and went on giving directions. She smiled at what I said, but gave me a peculiar look which frightened me, though I could not understand its meaning. Again my heart grew cold, and I was ready to burst out crying, but her caresses quieted me and gave me courage. She told me to go to the nursery and to read my book there and amuse my sister; she added, that as she was too busy to be with us now, she trusted me with the care of the child. I obeyed and went slowly back. A vague feeling of grief had suddenly poisoned my merriment, and even the thought that I was put in charge of my sister, which at another time would have been very agreeable and flattering to me, could not comfort me now. Our preparations for departure went on some days longer, till at last all was ready.

sunburnt fellow, caught me in his arms and carried me straight to the boat, while my father walked beside me along the plank, smiling and encouraging me ; for I, in the cowardice which still dominated me, was much alarmed by such an unexpected way of travelling. Four rowers sat down by the oars ; the man who had carried me across grasped the rudder ; and we pushed out from the side with a pole. Then all the five ferrymen crossed themselves, and the steersman said in a loud voice, ' Call God to our aid ' : off flew the boat across the stream, slipping over the eddying current which ran fast close to the bank. I was so much struck with this strange sight that I became quite dumb, and answered not a word to my parents' questions. All laughed and said that fear had robbed me of my tongue ; but that was not quite just : I was overcome, not so much by fear as by the novelty of the surroundings and by the noble spectacle, whose beauty I felt, though, of course, I could not explain it. When we got near the steep bank on the other side, and were poling our way through shallow water to the landing-place, I was quite myself again, and in as good spirits as ever I was in my life. Clean white sand, with banks of many-coloured pebbles, spread wide before us. One of the rowers sprang into the water, towed the boat by the painter to the landing-place, and made the bow fast to a post ; another did the same with the stern, and we all landed with no alarms. How many new objects I saw, how many new words I heard ! My tongue was at once untied, and I began to ask all sorts of questions of the ferrymen. I cannot forget the kindness of these good people, nor how simple and sensible were their answers to all my

questions, and how great their gratitude to my father when he gave them something for their trouble. We had a rug and pillows in the boat with us ; and these we spread out on the dry sand at a little distance from the water, because my mother was afraid of damp ; and she lay down on them, while my father took me off to pick up pebbles. To me these were an entire novelty, and I was enchanted when my father found me some of the pretty smooth stones, shining with different colours, and some with very pleasing and diverting shapes. In fact, as I became convinced at a later time, there is no place with such a variety of pebbles as the river Byélaya. We picked up some fossils too, which were long treasured in our household and might be called rarities : these were—a large piece of bees-wax, and a rather large flake or lump of fish's roe, completely petrified. It took long to bring across our carriage and covered-cart with nine horses, so that I had time to collect a whole heap of what seemed to me marvellous pebbles ; great was my grief when my father would not let me take them with me. He chose out a mere dozen or so and pronounced the rest to be rubbish ! When I tried to prove the contrary, I was not listened to, and with great regret I had to leave behind the heap I had gathered. We took our seats in the carriage and started again on our journey. The open air seemed to have a good effect on my mother's spirits, and I eagerly began to tell of the treasures with which my pockets were crammed and to exhibit them. My little sister was much pleased with the pebbles, and I made her a present of some of them. We had a number of boxes with us in the carriage and my mother

emptied one of these and put it at my disposal ; with a great effort I managed to pack my treasures in it.

At first our road went through the border of wood that fringed the river ; huge oaks, elms, and poplars impressed me by their size, and I kept calling out, ' Oh, what a big tree ' what is it called ? ' My father satisfied my curiosity. The road being sandy, our horses went at a walk, and our servants were able to pick leaves and branches for me, which they handed into the carriage, and which I looked at with much pleasure, noting their peculiar differences. The day was very hot : when we had driven fifteen versts, we stopped to bait the horses, our special object being that my mother might not suffer too much fatigue from the crossing and the journey. Our first meal was eaten, not in the open air, but in a Russian¹ village, of which I remember very little ; but, to make up, my father promised me that we should camp next day by the river Dyóma, where he wished to show me a kind of fishing of which I knew nothing, except from his accounts. While we rested in the shed of a peasant's farm-yard, my father occupied himself in preparing fishing-tackle for himself and for me, and to me this process was another new delight. Our fishing-lines were made of hairs pulled out of the horses' tails ; I was allowed to hold the hairs together while my father plaited them into a fine line. We were helped by Yephrem Yevséitch, a good-natured servant who

¹ The Russians were only settlers in the district of Orenburg ; the natives were either Tartars, or belonged to one of the Finnish tribes—Choovashes, Bashkirs, Mordvinians, and Meshtchers.

in dry flax (which we carried with us for such occasions), took it in his hand and began to wave it vigorously, backwards and forwards, up and down, and went on till the flax flared up. Then with the shavings and brands they set fire to the pile of wood that stood ready; and the flame began to blaze. Next the travelling samovar¹ was put on; the rug was spread out and pillows placed on it, my mother lay on them and prepared to pour out tea, she was feeling more energetic. I asked leave to light a small fire near where we were sitting, and when I was allowed, began, beside myself with joy, to work at it with the assistance of Yephrem, who on the journey had suddenly turned into my personal servant. Words cannot convey the pleasure I got from the kindling of this fire: I ran constantly from the big pile to the small one, carrying shavings and sticks and dry grass to keep the flame bright, till I got so hot that my mother had to make me sit down beside her. We had tea and then chicken broth, which was boiled for us by our cook. It was then settled that my mother and the children should pass the night in the carriage, and my father in the covered-cart. My mother soon lay down and put my sister beside her; the child had long been asleep in her nurse's arms. But I had no wish to sleep: I sat up with my father, talking of our halt next day, to which I looked forward with joyful impatience; but in the middle of our talk we both, for some reason, became thoughtful and sat for a long time without saying a word. The sky glittered with stars; the fragrance of the drying grasses of the steppe filled the air; the streamlet

¹ Tea-urn.

babbled in the hollow beneath the blazing fire threw a strong light on our servants, as they sat round a kettle and supped their smoking porridge, laughing and talking merrily. The horses too, as they munched their oats, reflected the fire light on one side. 'Time for you to go to bed, Servozha,'¹ said my father, after a long silence. He kissed me and made the sign of the Cross on me, and then put me in the carriage, taking care not to wake my mother. It was long before I went to sleep. I had seen and learnt so much that day that my childish fancy continued to conjure up a confused picture of all the scenes and objects that had passed before me. And then the events of to-morrow by the marvellous Dyoma! At last I was overcome by drowsiness and went to sleep in a kind of blissful intoxication.

We made such an early start next morning that it was hardly light when my father came to join us in the carriage. It was difficult for him to find a place, because the sleeping children took up so much room. In a kind of dream, I saw him sit down, and felt the carriage start and move at a foot-pace through the village, and heard the barking of dogs which followed us for some time; then I fell sound asleep, and when I woke we were half-way over the forty miles of uninhabited steppe which we had to cut across. When I opened my eyes, the others had long been awake; even my sister, seated on my father's lap, was looking out of the open window and babbling merrily. My mother said she felt better: she was tired of lying down and wanted to get up. We stopped, and all got out, to alter the arrange-

¹ A pet name for Serghéi (Serge).

ments for the night into those suitable for the day. All round us was the steppe, whose treeless undulating expanse stretched far away; in the dim distance scattered trees were visible and a patch of dark blue farther off: 'That,' said my father, 'is the course of the Dyoma, and the blue is the steep wooded bank.' The steppe was not so delightful and fresh as it is in spring or at the very beginning of summer—that aspect my father had often described, and I saw it myself later—for now the grass in the hollows had been mown and piled into haycocks, while in other places it was burnt brown by the summer sun; and the prairie grass, not yet fully shot, and not yet changed from blue-green to a whitish colour, spread in waves over the vast expanse. The steppe was very still: my father explained to me that all the birds had stopped singing, and were now hiding with their young ones in low-lying places where the grass grew tallest and thickest. We got into the carriage again, where nurse, who again took my sister on her lap, took her seat with us. My mother joined cheerfully in our talk, and I chattered without ceasing of yesterday's adventures. She reminded me of my books, and I confessed that I had forgotten all about them. I got out one volume of *Reading for Children*, and began to read; but I was so distracted by other things that for the first time I could not fix my attention on my book: though I read out in a loud voice, "Canaries! pretty canaries," cried the peasant under Masha's window . . . , I was thinking of something else, and chiefly of the Dyoma flowing over there in the distance. My parents could not help laughing at my divided attention; but I felt rather uncomfortable and

vexed with myself. At last, when I had finished the story of the 'Canary that died of Hunger' without the distress that I used to feel, I asked leave to shut my book and began to look out of the window, following attentively the blue distance, which seemed to come closer to us as if to cut across our path. The road began to wind upwards; Trophim, the coachman, shook the reins, and called out cheerily, 'Gee up, my beauties! Dyoma's close'; and our good horses set off at a fast trot. Already we could see the green valley through which the river flowed with its thick green border of wood. My father looked out of the window. 'Look, Seryorha,' he said; 'do you see that strip of green running straight to the river, with sharp white points sticking up here and there? Those are the felt covers of the wagons in which the Bashkirs pass the summer—the Bashkir caravans. If it were not so far, I would take you to see them, well, we'll manage it some day.' I looked eagerly and saw far off the summer quarters of the Bashkirs, with their flocks and droves of horses grazing round them. Though I had often heard of this from my father, it was the first time I had seen it myself. And now at last the river came in sight, and a number of islands, and the long bend of the channel in which the river formerly ran. The descent into the wide green valley was steep and winding: it was necessary to wedge the wheels, and drive down carefully; the delay tantalized me terribly, and I ran from one window to the other, making as much bustle as if I could hasten the approach of the longed-for halt. I was told to sit down and be quiet, and had reluctantly to obey. But at last we reached the river bank, just

full of fishing that the richness and beauty of the scene around were but dimly felt by me. As soon as we had finished tea, I began to beg my father to show me how to fish. At last we started, accompanied by Yevsétch. He had already shaped some tree-branches into rods; we made floats out of the thick green reeds, tied on our lines, and began to fish from the raft, relying on the information of the Bashkirs. Yevsétch had prepared for me a very light rod with a thin line and small hook; he now put on a piece of soft bread, dropped the line, and put the rod in my right hand while my father held me fast by my left. The same instant the float turned and sank in the water, Yevsétch called out, 'Pull, pull!' and with a great effort I pulled out a fair-sized perch! I trembled all over like a fever-patient, and was quite beside myself with joy. I caught my prey in both hands, and ran to show it to my mother, Yevsétch going with me. My mother was unwilling to believe that I could have caught the fish myself; but choking and stammering with excitement, I assured her that I had really pulled out that splendid fish with my own hands; and Yevsétch, to whom I appealed, confirmed my statement. My mother had no liking for fishing; she rather disliked it, and I was much hurt by her cool reception of my joyful tidings; but, worse still, when she saw me so excited, she said I would make myself ill, and must not leave her till I had calmed down. She made me sit down by her, and sent Yevsétch with a message to my father, that she would send me when I had rested and become calmer. To me this was an unexpected blow; the tears literally gushed from my eyes, but my mother had the firmness to keep

me till I was quite quieted. After a little my father came himself to fetch me. My mother was not pleased : she said she had never supposed, when she let me go, that I would fish myself. But my father persuaded her to allow me, for this once, to catch a few more fish, and my mother, after some time, consented. How grateful I was to him ! I believe that the disappointment would have made me ill, if I had not been allowed to go. My little sister begged to go with me, and as our fishing was only fifty yards off, she was allowed to go with nurse to watch our sport. When we got there, my father showed me some big perch and trout which he had caught in my absence ; the other fish were not taking then, because, as Yevséitch explained to me, it was too late in the day, and too hot. I caught a few more perch, and each gave me nearly as much delight as my first. As I had leave only for a short time, we soon returned. My father told the cook to boil and fry some large trout, and to give all the rest of the fish to the servants, to make fish-stew for themselves.

I went quite mad over fishing ! I could think and speak of nothing else. My mother was vexed, and said she would forbid it, as such excitement might lead to illness. My father assured her that the second time would be different and that my excitement would pass off ; I was convinced that it never would, and listened in terrible suspense to the decision of my fate. The baited hook, the quivering and diving float, the bending rod, the fish flapping on the line—the mere recollection of these things drove me wild with excitement. For the rest of our halt I was unhappy, not daring to speak about fish even to my father or sister ; and

indeed all seemed put out by something, and in this frame of mind we resumed our journey. On the way my mother tried to explain to me why it was wrong to abandon oneself so passionately to any amusement, how risky it was and even dangerous on the score of health ; she said that even a clever boy might turn stupid, if he forgot everything else for the sake of a mere sport ; I, for instance, instead of looking contentedly out of the window, or reading my book, or talking to my parents, was sitting there as silent as if I had been drowned. All this she said tenderly and affectionately, and I felt dimly the truth of her words : I quieted down a bit and began to read my book aloud. Towards evening rain fell, and the road became muddy and heavy ; poking my head out of the window, I could see the mud sticking to the wheels and then peeling off in great slabs. To me this was interesting and amusing, but our horses found it troublesome and began to go slow. At last, Trophim, our coachman, bent down to the front window and said that the state of the road would prevent us from reaching Paráshino in daylight ; we should be very late, and wear out the horses ; would it not be best to spend the night in a Choovash village,¹ close to which we had to pass ? This plan had already been talked of by my father ; in the forenoon we had covered forty versts, which left forty-five for the afternoon ; this was too much, and he fell in with Trophim's suggestion. My mother had no desire to spend the night among the Choovashes, to whose unclean habits she objected ; but there was no help for it, and the order was given to turn off to the village ;

¹ See note to p. 24.

we were fifteen versts short of Parashino. A few minutes later we left the road and entered the settlement. It had no streets. The houses were built on no plan: each householder had settled down where he liked; and each dwelling had a separate approach. The sun had already gone down in a cloudy sky, the rain went on falling, and darkness set in early; we were met by a fearful barking of dogs, of which the Choovashes keep even more than the Tartars. This barking (which went on steadily all night) now mingled with the shrill squeaky voices of the women, the jingling of their copper and silver ornaments, and the loud voices of our servants, as they abused the householders for hiding themselves in order to escape the trouble of putting up lodgers. For a long time our ears were pierced with this concert. At last, in spite of all concealments, the head-man was found, or rather his wife, who was discharging her husband's duties in his absence. She billeted us on a rich villager who owned several houses, so that it was possible to clear one out entirely for our use. It was damp, sitting in the carriage; so we went at once to the cabin, which was already lit by the light of a torch. Here again was a feast of novelty for my eyes. The first thing that struck me was the dress of the Choovash women—a white shift with red embroidery and a black piece stuck on behind, while the head and breast were covered with silver coins, ranging from large to very small, which went jingle-jangle at every movement they made. Other wonders followed—the roomy cabin, blackened with smoke and covered with shiny soot from the ceiling right down to the broad wooden settles along the walls, the stove without a chimney,

and lastly the burning torch that took the place of a candle : this was stuck into an iron socket, and the socket rested on a wooden stand, so that the light could be shifted from place to place. There was no dirt in the cabin, only a smell of smoke which was not unpleasant. We made very comfortable beds of the broad settles. My father tried to prove to my mother that she was wrong in her dislike of Choovash villages : nowhere else, he said, were there such roomy cabins and such wide settles, and they were far cleaner than Russian cottages ; my mother replied that the people themselves were dirty and disgusting, which my father did not deny, only asserting that they were very good-natured and very honest. The brazier attracted my attention, above all : the burning torch which was fixed in it required renewing constantly, and some of the torches burnt, if I may say so, very capriciously. The flame at times burnt bright, then nearly went out, and then blazed up again ; the burnt and charred stump sometimes bent out to the side, sometimes fell with a crackling noise and broke ; sometimes a torch suddenly began to hiss and send out a puff of grey smoke, like a jet of water from a fountain, to the right or left. My father explained that this jet was not smoke, but steam produced by the dampness in the wood. I was much taken up by all this, and was vexed when a candle was brought in from the carriage and the torch put out. We all spent a very good night, under our canopies, without which we never travelled anywhere. The rain passed off during the night, and the morning was fine ; but we did not start very early, because my father wished to have a whole day at Parashino, which was fifteen versts away. Hearing the name

often, I asked what Parashino was, and was told it was a large prosperous village, the property of my father's aunt, Praskovya Ivanovna Kurolyessova ; my father was commissioned to inspect the management of the estate and report to the owner whether all there was in good order. Eight miles from the village, we came to fields on the estate, covered with a tall crop of rye ; the rye was ripe, and the reaping had begun. The fields stretched so far that there seemed to be no end to them. My father said that this year's harvest was splendid and he had never seen such crops. The labourers, men and women, who were working stripped to their shirts, recognized our servants and my father ; they stuck their sickles into corn-stooks and hastened to the carriage. My father gave the order to stop. Sweat poured off the brown faces of the reapers, but the faces were merry ; a score of them came round our carriage, and all looked pleased. One who was older than the rest—an overseer, as I learnt afterwards—began the talk : ‘ Good health to you, *bátyushka* ¹ Alexyéi Stepanitch ; it is long since we saw you ; *mátushka* ² Praskovya Ivanovna wrote to us that you were coming ; we thought long for you.’ My father, without leaving the carriage, gave a kindly greeting to all and said, ‘ Well, here I am, and I have brought my wife and children with me.’ My mother looked out of the window and said, ‘ Good health to you, my friends.’ All bowed to her, and the same peasant spoke again : ‘ Good health to you, Sofya Nikolayevna ; you are welcome. Is that your little boy ? ’—he went on, pointing to me. ‘ Yes,’ answered my father : ‘ that is my son,

¹ Father.

² Mother. Both words are affectionate diminutives.

Seryozha, the little girl is asleep.' I was held up to the window, and all bowed to me as well and called me Serghéi Alexyéitch, a name that was quite new to me: 'We are glad to see you all, *batyushka* Alexyéi Stepanitch,' said the same man. Their pleasure was no pretence—one could see it in every face and hear it in every voice. I was puzzled by a feeling of emotion I did not understand: I felt affection for these kind people who loved us all so much. My father went on talking, asking many questions which I could not understand, but I heard them answer: 'We get on not so badly, glory be to God! But we don't know how we can keep pace with the crops, because many of the people are down with illness.' When my father asked why they were working for their owner on a holiday—it was the first of August and therefore a feast of the Church—they replied that such were the orders of the bailiff, Mironitch; they used not to work on that feast, but had done so for the last four years; the older men and the women with children had gone to the village the night before, but all would return after the church service; only the young people were now present, about a hundred sickles, in the charge of the overseer. My parents then took farewell of the reapers, both men and women. To their salutes I replied with a profusion of bows, though the carriage was already moving; I thrust my head out of the window and cried out, 'Good-bye! good-bye!' My parents smiled when they saw me; and then, much excited, I began to ask questions: 'How do these people know our names? Why are they so glad to see us? What do they love us for? What does "working for their owner" mean? Who is Mironitch?' and so on. My father found

it difficult to answer all my questions, but he got help from my mother. They told me that half the peasants at Parashino had been born serfs of the Bagróff¹ family, and knew very well that some day they would again belong to us. They knew my father because he often went to Parashino with his aunt, and loved him because he had never done them any harm ; and for his sake they loved my mother and me ; and that was how they knew our names. Mironitch was the bailiff ; and that word I understood perfectly ; but ' working for their owner ' was a little more than I could understand at my age.

On this occasion, as on many others, when I failed to understand some of the answers to my questions, I was not content with uncertainty, but invented explanations of my own. This is a common custom with children ; and so it often happened to me later to call a thing by its right name without perceiving the obvious connexion between the thing and the name. Life will, no doubt, explain all such things ; and it is sometimes amusing to discover one's mistakes, but at other times very mortifying.

After the rye came fields of spring wheat which were beginning to ripen. My father, as he looked at them, often said sadly : ' It will be impossible this year to clear the fields before the bad weather comes : the rye was late, and now the wheat is early. But what crops ! I never saw anything like them in my life.' I noticed that my mother was quite unmoved by my father's lamentations. But I, without understanding why, shared his regret that there would not be time enough to reap the fields.

¹ A pseudonym for Aksákoff.

CHAPTER IV

PARASHINO

OUR road now sloped upward, leaving the table-land on which we had been travelling; and at last we saw beneath us the prosperous village of Parashino, with a stone church, and a fair-sized pond in a hollow. The proprietor's stack-yard stood up like a town made of corn-ricks; and we could see that even the peasants had in their yards many sheaves of last year's corn. My father was delighted to see such abundance and said: 'It warms one's heart to see such good husbandry.' I shared his pleasure but noticed that my mother took no interest in what he said. At last we entered the village, just when the priest, wearing all his vestments and carrying the Cross above his head, preceded by the deacon with censer, banners, and ikons, and accompanied by a large crowd, came in procession out of the church to perform the ceremony of blessing the water. The singers' voices were drowned by the ringing of bells and only at intervals made their way to my ears. We stopped the carriage at once, got out, and joined the crowd. My mother held my hand; my sister, in her nurse's arms, gazed with unusual interest at a sight new to her; while I, though I had seen something of the kind before at Ufa, was charmed to see it again.

After the ceremony, we all kissed the Cross and were sprinkled with holy water. The priest congratulated us on our safe arrival; and we walked

to the Great House, which was only across the street from the church. A crowd of people came round us, and they were just as pleased to see us as the reapers had been ; several old men pushed their way to the front, and bowed, and gave us a very friendly greeting ; the first of these was a man past his youth, short and broad-shouldered, with hair turning grey and such odd eyes that I was quite terrified when they rested on me. The crowd accompanied us to the steps of the house, and then dispersed ; but the man with the terrible eyes ran up the steps, opened the door, and invited us to enter : ' Welcome, *batyushka* Alexyéi Stepanitch ! welcome, *matushka* Sofya Nikolayevna ! ' When we went in, it seemed as if all had been prepared for our visit ; but I learnt later that our aunt's chief agent and man of business always stayed there on his occasional rounds—Mihailushka my parents called him, but every one else gave him the respectful title of Mihail Maximitch—and therefore the house was always prepared for visitors. From what my father said, I guessed at once that the short man with the terrible eyes was that very Mironitch, about whom I had been asking questions on the journey. My father asked him questions about the farming of the land and then sent him off, saying he would be summoned when wanted, and bidding him send some of the older men, whose names he mentioned, to the house to see him. Young as I was, I noticed that Mironitch did not approve of this order. His ' Yes, Sir,' seems to sound in my ears at this moment and clearly meant, ' What you are doing is quite wrong.' When he had gone, a conversation took place

between my parents, which puzzled me exceedingly. First, my mother said that Mironitch was certainly a scoundrel. 'He looks like it,' said my father, smiling; 'and queer stories about him have come to my ears before now; but then he is a relation and favourite of Mihailushka, whom my aunt relies upon entirely. The old men whom I told him to send here are our own people; they know I won't give them away, and will tell me the whole truth. But Mironitch did not like it.' My father added that after dinner he would drive round the fields, to look at the work going on there. He invited my mother to go with him; but she gave a decided refusal, and said she had no wish to see it. 'If you like, you can take the boy with you,' she added. I was charmed, and begged to go; and my father readily agreed. 'All right,' he said: 'after tea Seryozha and I will have a look at the horses, and then we'll drive to the water-springs and the mill.' Of course I was delighted at this extension of the plan, of which my mother approved. So after tea we started for the stable, which was behind the house, across a grass-grown yard. The head groom, Grigóri, was waiting for us at the stable door with other stable-men; I fell in love with him at first sight, and he was very friendly with me. But before we had time to enter the stable, that horrid Mironitch turned up, and stuck close to my father all the rest of the day. The stable was a long building with a wide entrance; two passages ran to right and left, and in separate compartments along these horses were standing, mostly big full-grown animals, though some were young and small. I heard for the first time

that these compartments were called 'stalls'. On the wall just opposite the door hung a picture of St. Nicholas the Miracle-worker, Grigori told me. When my father had looked at both sides of the stable and praised its cleanliness, he went out again into the yard and ordered some horses to be brought out. Grigori did this himself with the help of another groom. The animals, being highly fed and little worked, neighed and reared, while both grooms, lifted off the ground, hung on to the horses' necks and gripped the halters with their right hand. I was frightened and kept close to my father; but when some of the splendid beasts were made to gallop and jump at the end of a long rope, and the grooms who held the rope, though they stooped and pressed their feet hard on the ground, could scarcely control them—then I was full of admiration. Mironitch was constantly interfering, and I was vexed when he spoke to the head-groom as Grishka,¹ though my father called him Grigori. My father asked the groom where the horses in the fields were grazing. His question was answered by Mironitch, who added: 'If it is your pleasure, Alexyéi Stepanitch, to examine the wheat and rye and the ground for autumn wheat (we shall have service in the church tomorrow and then begin the sowing), would it not be a good thing to have the droves of horses moved there? It would save you distance.' 'Very well,' said my father.

Leaving the stables, we started for the water-springs. Running water, and especially water from a spring, was always a pleasant sight to my father; and to me even the water running down

¹ A diminutive and less respectful form of Grigori.

the streets was a joy, so that I was naturally delighted by the splendid springs of Parashino, of which there were more than twenty. Some were very strong and spouted from the centre of a hill, others flowed busily at the foot of it, and some were on the slopes. These last were enclosed in wooden frames, which were roofed over and held wide troughs of linden-wood, where the water was so transparent that the troughs seemed empty ; in each trough the water brimmed over the edge and trickled down the sides like glass beads. I watched the peasant women coming with their pitchers. They pulled out the wooden pin at the end of the trough and placed a pitcher on the large stone flags. The water gushed out in an arch, because the bottom of the trough was raised high above the ground. In one minute the first pitcher was filled, and then a second. All these springs, and many others which were left to nature, flowed into the same pond over beds of small pebbles, among which my father and I found many shaped like sugar-loaves ; they were rather long and perfectly rounded, and were known as ' Devil's Fingers '. Having never seen them before, I took a great fancy to them and stuffed my pockets with them. As my father was quite unable to explain their names, I teased him for a long time with questions : ' What is the Devil like ? Why does he have such hard fingers ? '

Before I had got over these impressions, so new and delightful, I passed to another scene which, if less delightful, was not less interesting. This was the mill, to which my father next took me. A mill was a thing I had no conception of. First, there was the pond, fed by springs and fairly deep ;

then the mill-dam, a broad dike of manure, which bounded the pool and kept in the water, and lastly the mill standing on the centre of the dike, and containing a single pair of mill-stones. The mill worked properly only at high water: the difficulty was not, as my father explained to me, that there was little water in the pond but that the water trickled everywhere through the dike. To me this crazy old mill seemed a miracle of human skill. First, I saw the stream of water pouring through a pipe right down on the wheel; then the wheel, turning rather slowly, green with damp and covered with drops of bubbling water; the sound of the water mixed with another sound, of creaking and groaning. My father then showed me the wooden box or hopper, broad at the top and narrow below (I noticed this later), into which the grain is dropped. Next we went down below, where I saw the mill-stone revolving and the hopper shaking above it as it poured the grain under the stone. Round went the stone with its wooden rim, crushing the corn and converting it to flour, which poured down a wooden shoot. Looking aside I saw another wheel called the 'dry wheel', which revolved much faster than the other and caught hold of a small wheel with what looked like fingers, and turned the stone fixed to the small wheel. The mill was filled with flour-dust, and shook all over so violently that it seemed to jump off the ground. The sight of these marvels kept me long in a state of astonishment, though I remembered that I had seen something of the kind among my toys. We stood a long time in the mill, and saw there a bent and decrepit old man, whose business it was to pound all the

chaff for the proprietor's horses; he was grey-headed and looked ill, and was white all over with flour-dust. I began to ask him questions; but when I noticed that he was constantly choking and coughing, I felt sorry for him and addressed my remaining questions to my father. The hateful Mironitch was constantly interfering here too, though I was unwilling to listen to him. When we left the mill, I noticed that our clothes were white too, though not so white as the old man's. I begged of my father at once that the sick old man might be put to bed and given tea to drink. My father smiled; but turning to Mironitch, he said. 'The miller's man is very old and feeble; he has a terrible cough which the dust of the mill will do no good to; he ought not to be brought here but to be relieved altogether from work, even from light work.' 'As you please to order, Alexyéi Stepanitch,' replied Mironitch; 'but won't others feel injured? If we relieve him, we must relieve others. There are plenty of skulkers of that sort. Who will be left to do the light work?' 'Oh,' said my father, 'all old men are not weak; we ought to look after the veterans and let them rest; they have done a good stroke in their time. You will soon get old yourself; then you will be a "skulker" and want to rest.' Mironitch answered. 'I obey, Sir; your order shall be carried out. But we ought not to show kindness to that man: his grandson is a disorderly fellow and nearly strangled me the other day.' My father answered in an angrier tone than I had ever heard from him before: 'What, punish that wretched old man for his grandson's fault? No, no! punish the guilty.' Mironitch hastily

struck in: 'Do not trouble yourself, Alexyéi Stepanitch; your order shall be carried out.' I was beginning, I don't know why, to feel an internal trembling. Meanwhile the old man, seeing us stop, had moved slowly towards us; hearing what was said, he stopped also; he was shaking all over, and he bowed to us repeatedly. When we got to the top of the hull, I looked round: and there was the old man still standing there and bowing low. When we got home, I forgot all about the springs and the null, and began to tell my mother about the poor old man. She heard my story with warm indignation: she wished to send for Mironitch and reprove him on the spot, to dismiss him from his office and report his conduct to his mistress, Praskovya Ivanovna; and my father found it hard to restrain her from such precipitate steps. There followed a long discussion and even dispute. Much of it I did not understand, much I forgot, and all I remember is my father saying: 'Don't interfere in other people's business, or you will *spoil everything and cause the ruin of all that family*. At present Mironitch won't lay a finger on them; he will be afraid in any case of my reporting him to his mistress. But if it comes to turning out Mironitch, Mihailushka will support him. Then I may say a long good-bye to Parashino and, as likely as not, my aunt will be angry as well.' My mother yielded, but only after a struggle. Meantime, what a confusion of ideas went on in my small head: 'Why is the old man made to suffer? Why is Mironitch so unkind? What is the power of Mihailushka and his mistress? Why did my father not allow my mother to turn off Mironitch on the spot? If my father, as it

seems, has power to discharge him, why does he not do it? He is good-natured, of course, and never gets angry. Is that the reason?' Such were the questions with which my young brain buzzed, and I answered them all by deciding that Mihailushka and his mistress were unkind people, whom my father was afraid of.

My 'Devil's Fingers' I gave up to my sister, who had found it very dull without me. We placed the new acquisition with our former treasures—the wooden bricks and the pebbles from the river Byélaya. I eagerly described to my sister all that I had seen; it was a regular custom to let her know all that befell me in her absence. But by this time I began to notice that she did not always understand; so I borrowed words from nurse and tried to speak in language which a little child could follow.

After dinner my father and I started for the cornfields in a long low car. The objectionable Mironitch took his seat beside us. It was the first time in my life I had driven in a car of this kind, and I much enjoyed it: seated on a white mat folded in four, I was rocked just as if I was in a cradle hung on a supple bough. In the road over the steppe the cart sank so low in the ruts that the tall grasses and flowers whipped my legs and arms, much to my amusement; I was able even to pick flowers. But I noticed that for grown-up people the position was uncomfortable: they could not dangle their legs, but were forced to stretch them out and keep them up, in order not to strike the ground; but the grass only touched my shoes as I sat on the car. Between the cornfields, we drove along broad strips of untilled land, where cherry-

trees and wild peach-trees were growing; the cherries were hardly red and the peaches quite green. I asked my father to stop, and picked myself a whole handful of wild cherries, as small as large peas and quite hard, and filled one pocket with wild peaches. I wished to fill the other pocket with berries and take them back to my mother; but my father said that my mother would not even look at such 'trash'; the berries would be crushed in my pocket and spoil my clothes, and I must throw them away. But I was loath to part with them so soon, and kept them for a long time in my hand. At last I was obliged to drop them, but I don't know how or when I did so.

Wherever the rye was not 'laid' (as it is called), it stood high enough to hide us, carriage and horses and all. This was another new and pleasant experience for me. For a long time we drove along the strips between the fields; then we began to hear voices and an odd noise some distance off. The nearer we drove, the louder the sounds became, till at last we could catch the flash of sickles through the standing rye and could see ears of cut rye lifted up by some invisible hand; a minute more, and we saw the bending backs and shoulders of the reapers, about twenty men and women. When we came out upon the field, the talk ceased, but the rasping sound of the sickles on the straw grew louder till it filled the whole field with a sound new to me. We stopped our car, got out, and walked close to the reapers. 'God speed the work!' said my father; he spoke pleasantly, and at once all stopped working, turned their faces to us, and bowed low; some of the older men exchanged greetings with my

father and me. Their sunburnt faces showed that they were pleased: though some were panting and others had their fingers or their bare toes bandaged with bits of dirty rag, yet all were cheery. My father asked how many they were, and whether the work was hard. 'Pretty hard,' they replied, 'it must be, with such a crop; but the evening will put us right.' 'Very well,' said he; 'go on, and God speed the work!' In a moment the sickles were flashing again, and the handfuls of rye passing over the heads of the reapers, while the rasping of the stiff hard straw was heard over the field, louder than ever. I stood fascinated. Suddenly, I was attracted by a child's cry, and then noticed that here and there cradles were hanging under three sticks tied at the top and stuck in the ground. A young woman thrust her sickle into a sheaf she had bound, and went without hurrying to one of the cradles. She took the crying baby up in her arms, and sitting down at once by a stook made of five sheaves, kissed her child and caressed it and gave it the breast. The child soon stopped crying and went to sleep; the mother laid it in the cradle, took her sickle, and began reaping with redoubled efforts, in order to catch up her companions. While my father was talking to Mironitch, I could survey the surrounding scene at leisure. An intense feeling of sympathy for people who had to work so hard in the burning sun came over me; and I have never since been present in a harvest-field without recalling that first impression.

From this field we drove to another, then to a third, and so on. At first we got down to visit the reapers; but later we only stopped the car,

and my father called to them, 'God speed the work!' The scene was the same everywhere—the same kind pleased faces and the same simple words, 'Thank you kindly, *batyushka* Alexyéi Stepanitch.' Even to stop everywhere was impossible for want of time. We went also to the fields where spring wheat was beginning to ripen. My father and Mironitch spoke anxiously of the difficulty in getting hands enough to do the work. 'It's a real plague, Alexyéi Stepanitch,' said the bailiff: 'the rye ripened late and the wheat early; on the top of that come the late oats, and now it is time to be sowing. God sent us enough rain yesterday to soak the furrows; and I mean to send all the men to-morrow to begin sowing the wet land. Half the rye is still standing; and the women alone won't make much of a job of it. Would you allow me, *batyushka*, to get some extra work out of the people?' My father replied that the peasants had their own reaping also to do; it was hard to rob them of a day at such a busy season; it would be better to invite our neighbours to help. The bailiff was saying at some length that our neighbours lived far off and were not accustomed to help, when we drove up to some fields of peas and poppies. These attracted my attention; and my father told Mironitch to break off a few poppy-heads—they were still green—and to uproot an armful of the unripe pea-haulms; all of this he put at my disposal and even allowed me to eat one half-grown pod, the small flat peas of which tasted very good to me. At another time, this would have interested me much more; but just then my mind was full of the rye-field and the reapers; so I did not care much for my dozen

poppy-heads and armful of unripe pea-haulms, whose slender stalks I was holding in my hands. On our return, we visited the land for autumn sowing, and my father pointed out that it was pretty thickly covered with weeds and thistles. But Mironitch defended himself: the fields, he said, were too distant to drive the flocks there to graze them down, and all that green stuff would soon be uprooted by the harrow and would never grow again. For all this, my father was still rather dissatisfied; he said that the ploughing was too shallow in places, and the furrows too far apart, which accounted for the quantity of weeds. The sun was now sinking, and we had hardly time to look at the two droves of horses, the property of the landowner, which had been driven on purpose near to where we were. One contained a number of young horses of all sizes, and the brood-mares with foals at foot; the foals did something to divert my thoughts from the harvest scene. I liked to see them start and bound and then nuzzle against their mothers' flanks. The other drove could not even be approached without caution: my father made his inspection on foot with the herdsmen, and did not take me. These, I was told, were savage and dangerous animals which attacked strangers. It was getting dark when we reached home. My mother was becoming anxious and sorry she had let me go. Indeed, I was overtired, and fell asleep without even waiting for tea.

Next morning, as no one called me, I slept till pretty late and awoke to find a great to-do going on and much coming and going. A number of peasants had come to see my father, with various requests which Mironitch did not dare, as he said,

or more probably did not wish, to grant. This I learnt later from conversations between my parents. My father, however, would assume no authority : in each case he answered that he had been deputed by his aunt only to inspect the property and to report fully to her, but not to interfere with the bailiff's arrangements. Still, when he and Mironitch were alone, I myself heard him say : ' You might do so-and-so for one man, and so-and-so for another.' The bailiff's regular reply was : ' I obey ; your orders shall be carried out,' although my father repeated several times, ' I give no orders, brother ; I only make the suggestion for what it's worth. And I will report to my aunt that I gave you no orders ; so don't you make me responsible.' My mother had even more visitors than my father : the women came to her, some with petitions about the payments due from them, others complaining of divers illnesses. My mother would not even listen to the petitioners ; but to the sick she gave advice and even medicines from the chest she carried about with her. On the previous evening, when I was asleep, my father had interviewed the old men for whose attendance he had given orders. It was clear that they had said nothing very bad about Mironitch ; for my father was much more friendly with him than on the previous day, and even praised his zeal. The priest and his wife, when they came to say good-bye to us, spoke favourably of Mironitch. One thing the priest said was this : ' The bailiff is a man under authority and obeys his orders ; ' then he smiled and added : ' God alone is without sin ; the only misfortune is that Mironitch has so many relations in the

village and is so kind to them.' I was much puzzled, thinking that the more relations he had and the kinder he was to them the better. Our packing took a long time, I do not know why; it was about noon when we drove off, accompanied to the end of the village by Mironitch, a few old men, and a whole troop of the village children. We were to drive forty-five versts and to spend the night by the river Ik, which my father said was as fine a stream as the Dyoma and full of fish. So happy hopes began to stir again in my breast.

CHAPTER V

THE JOURNEY FROM PARASILNO TO BAGROVO

WHAT an astonishing thing travel is ! What an invincible power it has to calm and to heal ! It detaches you suddenly from the familiar sphere—whether you like or dislike it makes no difference—from the steady course of varied activity which constantly distracts your attention with a multitude of objects ; it concentrates your thoughts and feelings upon the narrow world of a travelling carriage ; it directs your attention first to yourself, then to memories of the past, and finally to dreams and hopes for the future ; and all this takes place clearly and quietly, with no hurry or confusion. This was just what happened to me then. At first my head swarmed with a confused mass of new objects, figures, and ideas—the Dyoma, our night in the Choovash village, the springs, the mill, the feeble old man working there, the field of rye and the reapers. Then each object grew separate and clear ; but dark mysterious points presented themselves, like stains upon my mental pictures, and I had recourse to my parents, begging them to clear these up and explain them to me. But all their explanations seemed to me unsatisfactory, probably because they talked to me as to a young child, not noticing that my questions were much beyond my years. At last I started the most recent of all my puzzles : why did they talk of Mironitch at first as a bad man and then speak to him at parting as if he were good ? They tried

to explain. There were few quite good people in the world, they said, the old men, whom my father had long known, were honest and truthful, and their account of Mironitch was to the following effect. He showed sense and energy in his office, and attended to the interests both of his mistress and the peasants. It was true, he favoured his own relations and the rich peasants who were in Mihail Maximitch's good books. But that was a matter of course: blood was thicker than water, and the chief agent must be treated with respect. He drank at times, but was always sober when work had to be done, and never used his fists without cause; he had not robbed his mistress nor the peasants of a single kopeck but made much money out of birch-resin and leather, because he was honoured by ¹ the rich peasants of Parashino, who traded in the resin burnt in the Bashkir forests and bought skins of big and small animals from the Bashkirs; though these peasants were not much pleased with Mironitch, they made large gains and were rich. In conclusion, the old men begged that Mironitch might not be disturbed, declaring that any change would be for the worse. I was much taken aback by this explanation, which needed to be explained still further at great length. Worldly wisdom is incomprehensible to a child: compromise has no place in his innocent mind; and I could not reconcile myself to the idea that Mironitch might use his fists without ceasing to be a good man. At last, my questions proved a nuisance, and I was told either to read my book or play with my sister. I did not care to read: I began to sort my pebbles and Devil's

¹ i. e. got money from.

Fingers, showing them off to my sister, giving them names, and telling stories about them.

Our journey was again very long, more than forty versts. About ten versts from Parashino we drove through a newly settled Russian village, after which for thirty versts there was no habitation of any kind, and the road ran over level ground with trees here and there and fine woods in the distance; soon low hills presented themselves, and then, on the right, a continuous chain of high rocky hills, in some places covered with wood and in others quite bare. As we went down the slope leading to the river Ik, we had to pass a village of Choovashes and Tartars, called Ik Karmala, because it lies on the slopes of the Karmalka, a small stream which runs into the Ik two versts from the village. We stopped outside the village, meaning to send there to buy oats and provisions for our servants to bring to the bank of the Ik, where we had settled to spend the night. The sun was still high; it was as hot as midsummer. Suddenly my mother suggested that it might be better to camp at Karmala, where the air was so dry, while it would inevitably be damp by the river at night. To me this was a death-stroke. Nor was my father pleased, but he answered, 'As you like, my dear.' My mother put her head out of the carriage window and glanced at the scattered huts of the Choovashes; then she pointed to one of the yards, which stood apart from the rest and enclosed a little hill, and said, 'That is where I should like to stop.' There were no obstacles. The owner, who was a rich Choovash, was very ready to let us camp there, because we did not ask for the use of his dwelling. We drove

quietly into the big yard, which was still green, and established the carriage, at my mother's wish, on the very top of the hillock. There was a pretty view from there : we could see all the picturesque surroundings of the Karmalka and the green woods of the Ik, as it flowed in the valley below. But I had no inclination for picturesque views. To fish in a river as good as the Dyoma, and to fish in the evening when, according to my father, fish took best—all these dreams had dispersed like smoke, and I stood like one sentenced to some severe punishment. Suddenly my father's voice rescued me from despair. 'Seryozha,' said he, 'I will ask the man here for a horse and car ; and he shall drive you and me to the Ik. There we will fish. At sunset I shall send you back with Yephrem ; I shall stay till dark myself. Ask leave of your mother,' he added, looking with a smile into my mother's eyes. I did not say a word, but one glance at my face told her all. She felt it impossible to deprive me of this pleasure ; but she was vexed and said to my father : 'I wonder you are not ashamed to tempt the child. He will get just as excited again as he was on the Dyoma.' But now I got back the use of my tongue, and eagerly assured her that I would be perfectly calm. Not at all pleased, she said : 'You may go, but mind you are back before sunset.' The permission given so unwillingly was like a douche of cold water to me. I tried to say that I did not wish to go ; but my tongue would not obey me. In a few minutes all was ready—horse, fishing tackle, and bait ; and off we set for the river. In later years I found that the Ik was just as good for sport as the Dyoma, but I was not then

in a state to be charmed by it. When I remembered that my mother had let me go unwillingly, that she was displeased and anxious about me, and that I was bound to return in a short time, I was impervious to all impressions of natural beauty and even to the charms of fishing which I already felt so strongly. And yet the spot to which we drove was really enchanting. A quarter of a mile above us, the river divided into two streams which flowed on quite close to one another. Below the division the water was shallower, and both channels were spanned by bridges carried over high posts; in one channel the water was still and deep, in the other shallower and faster. The growth of wood on the banks was as wonderful as on the Dyoma; both streams flowed to where it was thickest, and disappeared in a dense tangle of bushes and trees. To this point the Ik had flowed along a wide open valley; but now, in the distance, hills began to close in on both sides, some wooded, others bare and stony, and seemed ready to take the river under their domination.

My father chose a place to fish from, and he and Yevséitch soon set to work. A line, with a worm this time and not bread for bait, was given me, and I caught a small perch at once. The bait was renewed and the line thrown in, and I was given the rod to hold; but I felt so unhappy that I laid it down and begged my father to send me back to my mother. He was surprised: it was still early, he said, and the sun would not set for another hour; but I went on asking to go, and at last began to cry. My father had a great dislike to tears and was even alarmed by them;

so he told Yevséitch to take me home and then return as soon as possible, that they might enjoy the evening fishing together. My early reappearance surprised and even alarmed my mother. 'What is the matter?' she called out; 'are you not well?' I answered that I was perfectly well but did not want to fish. In my unsteady voice and tearful eyes she read at once all that was going on within me; she took me in her arms, and we both began to cry. She wished to send me back to the river, but I eagerly begged her not to do so; for my desire to stay with her was quite sincere; and she felt it would be as unkind to send me now as it would have been to keep me before. Yevséitch ran back to join my father, while I stayed with my mother and sister. Suddenly my heart became so light that I thought I had never felt such happiness before. After many tender words and caresses, my mother told me to play about the yard with my sister; but first she took care that all the owner's dogs were tied and shut up. Walking all round the hillock on which our carriage was standing, we made a discovery so wonderful that I ran back breathless with a joyful shout to tell my mother of it. It was this: a spring emerged from the back of the hillock, half-way down; the owner had placed a trough beneath it, and as all the buildings in the court were beneath the level of the spring, he had carried the water first to his summer kitchen, then to a large tank for washing clothes, and finally to the byres where his horses and cattle were shut up at night. I was enchanted by all this and eagerly described it to my mother. She smiled and praised the contrivance of the owner, which the distance of the

river made especially convenient. To complete my satisfaction, she allowed me to make a little bonfire near the carriage, our yard being quite like open field. The sun set in majesty behind the dark hills of the Ik. We drank tea, and later had our supper by the light of my bonfire. My father had not yet returned ; and sometimes the thought flashed through my mind : ' What is happening on the banks of the Ik ? how are the fish biting ? ' But these thoughts never clouded my bright happy feeling. What an evening it was ! How wonderful the sunset glow, as it gradually faded away and all the landscape slowly grew dark ! Soon a white cloud of mist concealed the trees along the river ; and my mother said : ' How damp it is over there, Seryozha ! a good thing that we are not camping there.' Still my father did not return, and she was inclined to send to fetch him ; but we had hardly lain down in the carriage, when he stepped up to the window and said in a low voice, ' Are you still awake ? ' My mother scolded him for being so late. They had not caught much, but my father had landed a large bream. I was very anxious to see it ; so Yevséitch brought a lighted pine-torch, and I gazed at the splendid fish without clambering out of the carriage. My father made the sign of the Cross over me, and then sat down to his supper. A few more words, a few caresses from my mother—and sound sleep came over me.

Having stopped early the day before, we made an unusually early start next morning. I was still half-asleep when I felt our carriage going down the hillock, and was quite awakened when my father got into the carriage beside us. I was

excited by the thought that I should soon see the Ik again, and I remained awake till sunrise. When we drove up to the first bridge across the Ik, the first rays of sunlight were visible ; a smoke was rising from the trees and especially from the river. My father had shut the window, whispering to me that the damp was bad for my mother, and I dared not open it ; but I saw through the pane that all the trees and both bridges were soaking wet, as if after heavy rain. But how beautiful was the river ! A light steam rose from its waters as they flowed swiftly past, forming eddies here and there. The tall trees were half veiled in mist. But as soon as we got on higher ground, the mist vanished and the first sunlight shone into the carriage, lighting up the face of my sister who was sleeping opposite to me. A few minutes later we were all sound asleep. Thanks to our early start, we arrived early at our halting-place, which was Korovino, a large settlement of Mordvinians.¹ There was no suitable place there for us to dine out of doors, and my mother did not like to stop in the villages ; so we chose a place between the last house and the village barrier. The splendid breem, which arrived quite fresh in wet grass, was cooked for our dinner. My mother, who thought fish bad for her, would only just taste it when pressed by my father. I was given a little piece of the side and found it uncommonly good, as my father also maintained. When the horses were fed, we set out about two in the afternoon on our last stage of 35 versts to Bagrovo. We made haste, wishing to arrive early ; for at Korovino, where everybody knew my grandfather and my father,

¹ See note to p. 24.

we had heard that my grandfather was unwell. On the way we twice crossed the river Nasyagai over very bad bridges. The first bridge was so unsafe that we had all to get out of the carriage, even the leaders were unharnessed, and the two wheelers made a shift to draw our heavy carriage across with its cargo of baggage. There the Nasyagai was still small; but when we crossed it again ten versts farther on, it was a fine river, very swift and deep; yet it was hardly half the size of the Ik, and the wood on its banks consisted of bushes only. The sun was still high—two trees high, in the phrase of Yevséitch—when from the top of a steep hill we caught sight of Bagrovo, lying in a valley between two large ponds half-covered with bulrushes, and bordered on one side by high woods of birch trees. I saw it all very well; for the steepness of the hill made it necessary to wedge the wheels, and my father and I walked down. My heart beat quick, I do not know why. When my mother looked at Bagrovo out of the carriage window, I noticed that her eyes filled with tears and that her expression was sad. I had guessed before, from conversations between my parents, that she disliked Bagrovo and was unwilling to go there; but I had heard the words without understanding or even attending to them, and only now realized that there were some good reasons for my mother's distress. My father too became depressed. I grew sad and took my place in the carriage with a sinking heart. In a few minutes we drove up to the steps of the house, which seemed to me melancholy and even small in comparison with our own house at Ufa.

CHAPTER VI

BAGROVO

My grandmother and aunt met us at the top of the steps. With cries and, as I thought, with tears they embraced and kissed my parents and then kissed my sister and me. Yet I felt at once that they showed less affection to us than the ladies who sometimes paid us visits at Ufa. My grandmother was an old woman and very stout; her dress and the handkerchief tied round her head were exactly like those of our nurse, Agatha, while my aunt had on just such a jacket and skirt as our maid Parasha.¹ I noticed at once that they were somehow quite different from my mother or our friends at Ufa. My father, followed by my mother, went in at once to see grandfather, leaving my sister and me alone in the parlour; my mother had just time to tell us to keep quiet, not to walk about through the house, and not to talk too loud. We were so dismayed by these injunctions after the want of warmth in our reception, that we felt afraid, and sat in silence on a settle. We were quite alone; for our nurse, Agatha, had gone out into the passage, where she was surrounded by the maids and the wives of the outdoor servants. Some time passed in this way; at last my mother returned and asked where nurse was. Agatha bounced out of the passage, vowing she had only left us that instant, though in fact we had never seen her since we

¹ A diminutive form of Praskóvya.

entered the parlour, and had only heard the whispering in the passage. My mother took us both by the hand and led us into grandfather's bedroom. He was undressed and was lying in bed ; there was a growth of white beard, nearly two inches long, on his face ; and to me he seemed very alarming. He stretched out a hand to us and said, ' How are you, my little grandson and granddaughter ? ' My mother whispered to us to kiss his hand. ' I can't see just now,' he went on, blinking and placing a hand over his eyes, ' who Seryozha is like : when I saw him before, he was too young to resemble any one : but Nadyézhdá¹ is like her mother, surely. To-morrow, God willing, I will manage to get up. I'm sure the children are hungry after their journey ; let them have something to eat. Well, go now and make yourselves at home in the new nest.' We all went out and found the samovár² waiting in the drawing-room. Grandmother wished to give us thick cream in our tea, and scones made with butter, and we werẽ willing enough ; but my mother asked for common white bread instead of the scones, and said we drank our tea without milk and never got cream or any rich food. ' Well, well ! ' said grandmother ; ' you just tell us, my dear, what your little ones eat and what they don't eat, or else I shall not know what to give them. We are plain country people and don't know your town fashions.' My aunt chimed in, saying that her sister-in-law must make her own arrangements and send for Stepan, the cook, and tell him what should be dressed for the children. Though I did not then understand what was

¹ i. e. Hope, a common girl's-name.

² Tea-urn.

behind this talk, I felt at once something strange and unfriendly. My mother answered very respectfully : there was no need for them to trouble themselves about our food ; nothing but chicken-broth would ever be needed ; she did not give me milk, because my long illness had made her anxious , and from my example, my sister had got into the way of drinking tea without milk. Then grandmother asked my mother to choose one of two rooms, the parlour or the drawing-room, for our own use. My mother said, she would have preferred the drawing-room but feared that the proximity of such young children might disturb her sister-in-law. My aunt replied that she would hear no noise, as the wall between the rooms was thick and there was no door ; so we took possession of the drawing-room. We had with us a double bedstead of iron, which unscrewed and came to pieces. This was at once put together and set up by two of our men-servants, while Parasha hung a very pretty curtain over it. I am not sure of the material, but I believe it was muslin ; the bunches of flowers on it were so pretty that I found great pleasure, even when I was much older, in looking at them. When the curtains of the same were hung over the windows the room suddenly looked quite different, and my heart became much lighter. Our travelling trunks also were dragged into the drawing-room and covered with a rug. I did not forget my own little box which held the pebbles, or my books ; all these I set on a little table in one corner. Before supper, my parents went to grandfather's room and sat there some time. They wished to take us also to say good-night, but grandmother

said that he must not be disturbed, and that it was time for children to go to bed. When we were left alone in the new nest, my sister and I began to chatter; I say 'alone', because nurse again left the room and began to talk in whispers with some one outside the door. I told my sister that I was unhappy at Bagrovo, that I was afraid of grandfather and wished to be travelling again in the carriage, and much more to the same effect; but my sister hardly understood me, and as she was nearly asleep, talked such nonsense that I laughed. When at last sleep overcame her, I called nurse, and she put her to sleep in my mother's bed, where there was a little place prepared for me too; for my father a bed was made on the sofa. I too lay down. At first I felt sad and then bored, till I fell asleep. I do not know how long I slept; but when I woke, I saw by the light of the lamp burning before the ikon, that my father was lying on his sofa and my mother sitting beside him, crying.

For a long time my mother spoke in a low voice sinking at times into a whisper, and I could not, though I strained my ears to listen, catch the connexion of all she said. Sleep fled from my eyes. I heard her say: 'How can I leave them, and in whose care? I shall die of grief, and no doctor will do me any good,' and my father's reply: 'Do take care of yourself, my dear; you will certainly be ill to-morrow and unable to get up'—and these words, caught among many others by my straining ears, alarmed and terrified me. The thought of our staying alone at Bagrovo without father and mother was not new to me, but I seemed never to have realized it till now;

and it suddenly came over me with such horror that for a time I was unable to hear and understand, and so lost much of the conversation which I might have heard. At last, at my father's urgent request, she consented to lie down. Before doing so, she prayed and made the sign of the Cross on both of us. I pretended to be asleep; but I did not really go to sleep before she did.

My father's prophecy proved true: when I woke next morning, I saw him and Parasha busy at my mother's bedside; she was very ill with a bilious attack and fever. When she had been ill before, she still went about; but now she was too weak to rise. I had never yet seen her so ill, and fear and grief mastered me. I was old enough to understand that my tears would cause her pain and do her harm; so I crept behind the high head of the bed, and cried quietly, wrapped up in the ample folds of the curtain. My father saw me and held up a warning finger, pointing to my mother; I nodded and shook my head, as a sign that I understood his meaning and would not cause her anxiety.

My father then went to see grandfather; coming back he reported that he was better and wished to get up. In the parlour my aunt was pouring out tea. Nurse called to me to go there, but I refused to stir a step from my mother; and my father, fearing that if compelled I would burst out crying, brought me tea himself and a roll made without butter, just like the rolls which used to be sent from Bagrovo to us at Ufa. My sister and I (and indeed all of us) were very fond of them: but now I could not swallow it, and hid it under the large feather-bed on which my mother was

lying, that I might not be forced to eat it. The parlour door was constantly opening, and I could hear my sister chattering gaily to her grandmother and aunt, and I felt rather vexed with her. I heard her being taken to grandfather's room and felt sure my turn would come soon. My presentiment came true on the spot : my aunt hurried in and said that grandfather was asking for me. My father said in a loud voice, ' Go to your grandfather, Seryozha.' My mother quietly called me to her side ; she smoothed my hair and looked attentively at my red eyes ; then she kissed my forehead and said in my ear, ' Be sensible, and friendly with your grandfather ' ; and her eyes filled with tears. How much it cost me to go ! My aunt led me off by the hand, while my father stayed with my mother. My face must have expressed much suffering and fear ; for my aunt stopped in the servants' room to caress me and say, ' Don't be frightened, Seryozha ; grandfather won't bite you.' I could hardly restrain the tears that were ready to gush from my eyes, and stepped timidly over the threshold of grandfather's room. He was sitting in a queer old arm-chair covered with leather and decorated with copper bosses along the edges. Strangely enough, the arm-chair and the copper bosses were the first things I noticed : they attracted my attention and served to give me some courage. He wore his dressing-gown, and my sister was on his knee. As soon as he saw me, he put my sister down on the floor, stretched out a hand, and said in a kind voice, ' Come here, Seryozha.' I kissed his hand. ' Why are your eyes red ? You've not been crying ? Why, you want to cry now ! I see you're frightened

of your grandfather and don't love him.' 'Mamma is ill,' I said, mustering up all my strength in order not to cry. At this point, my grandmother and aunt broke in, explaining that I was intensely attached to my mother and would not stir a step from her, and that she had trained me to this. They said much to this effect, but grandfather seemed not to listen to them: he watched my face attentively, but so good-naturedly that my fears began to pass off. 'Do you know who Seryozha is like?' he said at last in a loud cheerful voice; 'he's the picture of my uncle, Grigori Petrovitch!' Next he took me on his knee, stroked my hair, kissed me, and said, 'Don't cry, Seryozha; mother won't die this time'; and he began to ask me questions, which went on for a long time, about Ufa and what I did there, and our journey, and so on. I plucked up courage and talked, especially of my books and the journey, while he listened attentively and smiled in a way that flattered me. At last he said: 'You do well to love your mother: she did not spare herself when she nursed you. Now go back to her, but don't make a noise and disturb her; and don't cry.' I answered that my mother would not see me at it; for I hid in the curtains when I wished to cry. Then I kissed his hand, and ran back to her, leaving my sister in the room. When my mother heard my quick steps, she was frightened; but the sight of my happy face comforted her. At once I began to describe my interview with grandfather in the minutest detail, and the leather arm-chair with the copper bosses was not forgotten; my father and even my mother could not help smiling at my eager and particular

account of the arm-chair. 'Glory to God,' said my mother, 'I see that your grandfather was pleased with you. You must love him; he is so kind.' 'I do love him,' I replied; 'and if you like, I will go back to his room at once.' My mother said this was not necessary, but asked my father to go and sit there; what she really wished was to hear what the old man would say of her children. Though I was satisfied, to all appearance, with grandfather's reception of me, yet he was not so pleased to see me as I had expected from what I had been told; and I asked my mother the reason. She replied that grandfather was not well just now and had other things to think of; which explained his bearing to us.

Together with Parasha I now began to be busy about the sick-bed and nurse the patient, giving her some medicine which she made up on Buchan's instructions, and a drink made of cranberries. She had asked for lemons; but the servants said they had never even seen such a thing. 'How stupid I am!' she said, and then asked for cranberries. Parasha at once brought a whole slop-basin full of them, adding: 'They have plenty of cranberries here: a whole cart-load is brought every year from Old Bagrovo, when the roads are first open in winter.' Then my mother asked for black bread and vinegar, to tie on her head; I liked it so much that I put little pieces in my own mouth. Next she wished to go to sleep and made me read aloud; I began at once upon *Reading for Children*; and she did really go to sleep and slept a whole hour. Through the window I could see my sister playing in the garden

with her nurse, Agatha, among currant-bushes and barberries; the bushes were old and larger than I ever saw before or since. Birds with red-yellow tails kept flying out of the bushes, and once a striped cat sprang out of one. I felt a strong inclination to join them.

My mother awoke and said she felt a little better. My father then came in; and I asked at once if I might play in the garden with my sister. My mother gave me leave, but told me not to go near the river, which was my chief object, as my father had often told me of his dear Boogoorooslan, and I wanted to have a close view of it. The garden, I found, was not a real garden, even less so than those I had seen at Ufa. It was more like an orchard or kitchen garden. It consisted mainly of currant-bushes, laden with their white, red, and black berries, and of apple-trees; but most of these having been killed by the last winter, the branches had been sawn off and new grafts inserted. Round these were high banks of manure on which grew melons of different kinds and gourds, and a vast quantity of rows of cucumbers and vegetables of all sorts—peas, beans, radishes, and carrots. Besides all this, in every vacant space sunflowers and fennel were grown; and lastly, a hollow, which was under water every spring, was green with a huge multitude of cabbages. This mixture of things was not pretty, but it pleased me then, and pleases me still, certainly far more than walks of pollarded limes or beeches or unhappy yews cut in the shape of pyramids, or spheres, or chests of drawers. On the right side of the garden, the swift and deep river flowed close to the house, and then took

a sudden bend to the left, and in this way actually bounded the so-called garden on two sides.

I had barely time to go round and examine it, and to talk to my sister, who with nurse's help told me how grandfather had kept her a long time and been very kind to her and finally sent her to play in the garden—when Yevséitch came running to call us to dinner. It was twelve o'clock, at which hour we usually had lunch, dining at three; but Yevséitch said that grandfather always dined at midday and had already sat down at the table. We hastened back to the house and entered the parlour. Grandfather gave orders that we should be put directly opposite him at table; and as we had no high baby-chairs with us, a pile of cushions was placed under each of us, and I laughed to see my sister perched so high, though I was nearly as high myself. Then, remembering I had not seen my mother when I came indoors, I began to ask if I might go now; but my father told me in a whisper to be quiet—I could go after dinner; I had never heard him speak so severely, and I held my tongue. Grandfather wished to help us to different things he was eating; but grandmother stopped him; she said that Sofya Nikolaevna gave nothing of that kind to her children and that broth had been made for them. He frowned and said, 'Very well; let their father give them what he thinks fit.' He himself and all his family were on 'fast' diet;¹ it was the first day he had been out of bed, and yet he ate cold fish-soup, fish, lobster, porridge with oil for milk, and mushrooms. The smell of the colza oil forced itself up my nose, and I said, 'What a bad smell

¹ See note to p. 297.

it has !' My father pulled my sleeve and again whispered that I must not dare to speak like that ; but grandfather had caught my remark and said, 'Hullo, brother. how squeamish you are'—at which my grandmother and aunt smiled, but my father blushed. After dinner grandfather went to see my mother, who was lying in bed and ate nothing all day. After sitting there a little. he went to lie down ; and at last we four, parents and children, were left alone. I now heard that grandfather had come to our room before dinner, and was very sorry when he saw how ill my mother was. He had advised her to start at once for Orenburg, though before, as I knew from my parents' talk, he had called this journey a caprice and a useless waste of money, as he did not believe in doctors. My mother replied (so I was told) that her present illness was a trifle, which would soon pass off, and that she needed a little time to get fit for the journey to Orenburg. Again the thought of separation from my parents came over me. To remain a whole month at Bagrovo, alone with my sister, seemed so terrible that I did not know what to wish. I remembered how at Ufa I had begged my mother to lose no time in going to see the doctor ; but the words I had overheard the night before—'I shall die of grief, and no doctor will do me any good'—shook my belief that she would come back cured from Orenburg. All this I explained to them as well as I could, accompanying my explanations with tears ; but it was not hard for my mother to make me believe whatever she wished, and to calm my fears. In spite of my dread of the separation, I soon had only one wish : that she should start as soon as

possible for Orenburg, where the doctor would be certain to cure her. I noticed that from this time my mother was on her guard, and never said, before me, anything likely to alarm me and make me anxious ; or if she did, she spoke too low for me to hear. She made me read longer than usual, or play with my sister, or go for walks with Yevséitch ; she even sent me out with my father to see the mill and the island. I liked the mill-pond and the island well enough, but at any other time I would have liked them better ; later I had a perfect passion for them.

In a few days, my mother could get up ; the bilious attack and fever were over, but the whites of her eyes were yellow, and she was even thinner than before. I soon noticed that they were preparing in earnest for the move, and that my grandfather himself pressed them to start soon on their long journey. My mother once said to him, before me, that she did not like to burden her relations with the care of the children, and was afraid of causing him trouble, if one of us fell ill. He replied with some heat : ' That is all nonsense. The children are not strangers' children ; who should look after them, if not their own grandmother and aunt ? ' My mother said that she did not trust our nurse : she would put me in charge of Yevséitch, who was very good-tempered and conscientious, and he would go out walking with me. Grandfather answered, ' Well, that 's all right : Yephrem comes of a good stock ; or if you like, I will give you my maid Aksinya to look after the children. ' She declined this gracious offer, on various pretexts : in fact, she knew that Aksinya was cross. Grandfather was

rather hurt. 'As you please,' he said: 'I and my Aksinya don't want to be a nuisance to any one.' Also I heard my mother when with tears she begged and prayed my grandmother and aunt to be kind to us and watch over us, to give us no rich food, and not to dose us, in case of illness, with their stock remedies; for they treated young and old alike, whatever their complaints, with 'Haarlem Drops' and 'The Elixir of Life'. My grandmother and aunt were not pleased, and indeed made no concealment of it, to have us left upon their hands; yet they promised, in submission to grandfather's authority, to keep a constant watch over us and to fulfil all my mother's requests. In case of emergency, my mother left some drugs, out of her own medicine-chest, with written directions for their use, if either of us fell ill. These were in the charge of my aunt Tatyana, who was kinder than grandmother and could not but pity the tears of a sick mother parting for the first time from her little children.

Till my mother's departure I was constantly uneasy and divided in my mind. When I saw her pale, and thin and weak, I had only one wish, that she would go as soon as possible to consult the doctor. But as soon as I was alone, or with others of whom she was not one, I was overcome with grief at the approaching separation, and fear of staying behind with relations who were less affectionate than I wanted them to be, and either did not love us, or loved us so little that my heart did not turn towards them; and my imagination, too active for my years, suddenly put before me such terrible pictures that I threw aside my occupation, either books or pebbles or walking

in the garden, and ran off to my mother, as if out of my mind with grief and fear. Sometimes I was on the point of springing into her arms and begging her not to go, or to take us with her; but her suffering face always recalled me to myself, and the wish that she should go to see the doctor always conquered my fear and grief. I do not understand now why it was settled to leave us at Bagrovo. They were going in the same carriage, and there was as much room for us as there was before; but my mother never had this intention, and told me, even at Ufa, that she could not on any account take us and must travel to Orenburg alone with my father; her purpose never once wavered at Bagrovo, and I was fully convinced that to change it was impossible.

The next week, in spite of my grief and painful anxiety, passed more quickly than usual for me; and at the end of it my father and mother went away. At parting I was unable to control myself: my sister and I wept and sobbed, and so did my mother. When the carriage turned out of the court and vanished from my sight, I became quite wild, dashed down the steps, and ran in pursuit of it, crying, 'Mamma! Mamma! come back!' As this was unexpected, it was impossible to stop me at once: I had time to run across the court and reach the road. Yevséitch, behind whom a number of servants came running, was the first to come up with me; he caught hold of me and carried me back, grasping my arms tightly. Grandfather and grandmother were standing on the top of the steps; my aunt, who had come down to meet us, tried to comfort and caress me. But I would not hear a word; I screamed and

wept and tried to wrench myself from the strong arms of Yevséitch. He climbed the steps and set me on my feet before grandfather, who called out angrily, 'Stop that yelling! What are you crying about? Your mother will come back; she won't stay for ever at Orenburg.' His words quieted me. He went into the house and to his own room, and I heard grandmother say, as she followed him, 'There, *batyushka*, you see for yourself what trouble we shall have. These children are very spoilt.' My aunt led me by the hand to the drawing-room, which was our bedroom. My dear little sister, holding my other hand and herself crying quietly, kept saying, 'Don't cry, brother, don't cry!' When we entered the room and I saw the bed where we always slept with our mother, I threw myself upon it and began again to sob loudly. My aunt, Yevséitch, and Agatha the nurse, tried every means to calm me—my books and bricks and toys. Yevséitch tried to dry my tears by talking of our journey, of the Dyoma, of fishing, and of fish. But it was all in vain: only when I was worn out with tears and sobbing, I did, I don't myself know how, at last fall asleep.

CHAPTER VII

WE STAY AT BAGROVO WITHOUT OUR PARENTS

My sister and I spent more than a month, in the absence of our parents, as unwelcome guests at Bagrovo. Most of the time we were shut up in our own room; for damp weather soon set in and put a stop to our playing in the garden. I will describe the course of this monotonous and gloomy life. As soon as we woke, which we did regularly at eight, nurse took us to see our grandparents, who, after good-mornings were said, spoke a few words, or sometimes did not speak at all, and then sent us back to our own room. About twelve we went to dinner in the parlour; though there was a door leading straight to the parlour from our room, it was locked, and even curtained over; and we went along the passage, from which at that time a door led into the drawing-room. At dinner we were always seated at the bottom of the table, opposite to grandfather, and always on high cushions. Sometimes he was in good spirits and talked to us, especially to my sister, whom he used to call his little fawn; but at others he was in such a bad temper that he spoke to nobody. As my grandmother and aunt were silent too at such times, my sister and I, feeling bored, would begin to whisper together; but Yevséitch, who always stood behind my chair, at once stopped me, whispering in my ear to be silent; and Agatha treated my sister just the same. They told us afterwards that we must not

dare to speak when the 'old master' (as they called grandfather) was in low spirits. After dinner we went at once to our own room, where tea was brought us at six. Supper was usually at eight, and we were taken to the parlour and seated opposite grandfather, just as at dinner; immediately after supper we said good night and went to bed. On the first few days our aunt looked into our room and showed some sort of interest in us; but she soon came less often, and at last never came at all. We saw her and the rest only at dinner and supper, and to say good morning and good night. At first the maids in the house and the wives of the outdoor servants came to see us on various pretexts, and asked to kiss our hands, which we refused to let them do, being unfamiliar with the custom; they asked some questions and went away; and soon not one of them came near us. I think this was due to some order of my grandmother or my aunt. I myself heard the latter say that Sofya Nikolaevna did not wish her children to talk to the servants. Our nurse too, Agatha, was in the habit of disappearing from the time of early tea till dinner, and again from dinner till tea in the evening. On the other hand, Yevséitch never left us the whole day, and even slept every night in the passage at our door. He told stories to amuse us, or shared in our games, or listened to my reading. The tie between me and my dear sister became stronger than ever, though she was still so young that I could not fully share with her my thoughts and feelings and wishes. For instance, she did not understand, what I understood perfectly, that we found little love in the house-

hold ; and for that reason she was bolder and merrier than I, and often began of herself to talk to her relations. Hence she was liked much better than I was, and especially by grandfather : he sometimes sent for her and kept her in his room for a long time. Though I was quite aware of this, I was not jealous : first, because I loved her ; secondly, because I had no friendly feeling to grandfather, and could not help being frightened in his presence. I ought to say that I had a special reason for fearing rather than loving him : I once saw him with my own eyes when he was stamping on the ground with rage ; and then from our room I heard terrible and pitiful cries, which puzzled me. But our nurse, Agatha, made haste to explain it all to me, though the worthy Yevsitch scolded her for telling a child what a child had no business to know.

And so by degrees we settled down to a life of our own in our small corner, in the drawing-room which we occupied. The first days after the departure of my parents I spent in constant grief and tears ; but by degrees I grew composed, took my bearings, and settled down. Every day I gave my little sister a reading-lesson ; this was a complete failure, as she had not mastered even the alphabet at the end of our stay at Bagrovo. Every day I made her listen while I read *Reading for Children*, taking all the stories and articles in order, and leaving out none, though there were many which I could not understand myself. My poor little listener often yawned and sometimes fell asleep while I read, though she tried hard to keep her pretty eyes fixed on my lips ; then I played games with her, building towns and

churches of our bricks, or houses, of which the inhabitants were her dolls. But her favourite game was 'Visitors'. We sat in opposite corners, and I took one or two of her dolls and paid a visit with them to my sister, which I did by walking across from one corner to the other. She had a number of dolls, all of which she called her daughters or nieces; this gave rise to many conversations and entertainments in complete imitation of grown-up people. I remember how I gave full play to my imagination and described many surprising adventures that had befallen me, taking some hint or model from incidents I had read in my books or overheard. Thus, for example, I described a burning house, and how I jumped down from the window with two children—the children being two dolls which I was holding in my arms; another scene was an attack by robbers, all of whom I put to flight; my final effort was a dragon, which lived in a cave in the garden, with seven heads, which I intended to hack off. I was much flattered by the impression which these narratives produced on my sister. Sometimes I succeeded in frightening her: one night she slept badly and awoke crying; she said she had dreamt of robbers and dragons, and that her fright was due to me. Nurse threatened that she would complain to grandfather; so I reined in these fiery flights of my youthful fancy.

During our parents' absence, three aunts, sisters of my father, paid visits to Bagrovo. The first, Alexandra, made on me a very unpleasant impression; and so did her husband, though he was very fond of us, often taking us on his knee and constantly kissing us. This new aunt did not

like us at all : she was always making fun of us as 'cockneys' and 'milksons', and, as far as I could understand, she spoke very unkindly of my mother, and expressed contempt for my father. Her husband's behaviour was at times eccentric and even alarming : he made a great noise—stormed and sang, and used language which must have been very objectionable, because both the aunts tried to shut his mouth with their hands, and warned him that grandfather was coming. This made him disappear at once, as he was in great awe of grandfather. The second aunt who came to the house was Aksinya, my god-mother. She was a very good-natured woman, and very kind to us, especially when she was alone with us ; she even brought us presents, some raisins and prunes, which she gave us in secret and told us to eat when no one was looking. She scolded our nurse for the dirtiness of our room and clothing, told her to change our frocks oftener, and threatened to let Sofya Nikolayevna know the state in which she had found us. We were delighted by her kind way of speaking to us and became very fond of her. But one thing troubled me—her telling us to keep secret the dainties she had given us. My parents had always taught me to do nothing underhand ; so I decided to put away the raisins and prunes till my mother returned. The third aunt, Elizabeth, who was called by everybody 'The General's lady', came for a short time ; she was a very proud lady, and never spoke to us at all. She brought with her two daughters, a little older than I, and left them with her parents when she went off at the end of three days. The presence of two cousins should

horse, and galloped to the village. The people collected in no time. They hurried off with spades, dug out Aréfy, put him on a sledge; covered him with a sheepskin, and carried him home. When they got there, they rubbed him for a long time with snow before taking him into the house; he was stiff all over, and kind of asleep from the cold and snow. When he woke, they carried him indoors, but he was still unconscious. Next day he came to himself and asked for food. He is quite well now; only he can't speak right since. Well, there's a real true story for you, my little falcon. If you wish, I will show him to you, next time he comes to our back door.' I was much taken up with the story of Aréfy, and Yevsétch pointed him out to me a few days later; he often came to beg of grandfather. Every one spoke of him as 'silly'; and in fact he was quite unable to tell me his story—how he was buried in the snow and his subsequent adventures.¹

¹ It is remarkable that this poor fellow, who lived for three days under the snow in a hard winter frost, was actually frozen to death twenty-five years later, in a very slight frost in September after heavy rain. As before, he had gone to the very same place for firewood; as before, he lost his horse, which got home alone; as before, he must have wandered about in search of the path. Cold and fatigue evidently made him so weak, that at last, when close to the village, he fell into a shallow ditch and had no strength to climb out of it. Autumn nights are long; so it is impossible to tell at what time he fell into the ditch. He was found at eight o'clock next morning by the writer, who was driving out to follow game; he was then dead and quite stiff. (*Author's Note.*)

The case of Mrs. Elizabeth Woodcock, who survived after being buried for a week under snow at Impington near Cambridge, in February, 1799, is very like this.

I once asked my aunt for some books to read. It appeared that her library consisted of three volumes: a 'Song Book', an *Interpreter of Dreams*, and a dramatic composition of the vaudeville kind. For some reason she did not think fit to give me the 'Song Book'; but the other two came into my hands and both made a strong impression upon me. I learnt by heart the significance of different dreams, and for long I was fond of interpreting my own dreams and those of other people, and believed in the truth of these interpretations; nor was it till I reached the University that this superstition was entirely removed from my mind. The interpretations given in the book were utterly absurd: they had not even that feeble support of observed facts which one may hear among the common people. I still remember some of them, and here are a few specimens: 'To catch a fish means bad luck.' 'To drive in a cart portends death.' 'To dream that you are standing on a dung-heap is a sign of riches to come.'

The play had two names: the first I forget, but the second was, 'A Trifle for the Stage.' Trifling indeed it was; but how I enjoyed it! In the first scene, a shepherdess or peasant girl, driving home a flock of geese, sang some verses which began and ended with a refrain:

'Geese, geese, come home!
Geese, cease to roam!'

Two more lines of another song I remember:

'Cornflower blue,
How I love you!'

The details are given in Gunning's *Reminiscences of Cambridge*, vol. ii, p. 122. (*Translator's Note*.)

That is all I remember ; I only know that it was the story of the love of a shepherdess for a shepherd, and that her grandmother refused her consent to their marriage and then relented. Thus began with me a strong inclination towards dramatic composition, which grew stronger every year.

Grandfather received only one letter from Orenburg. It contained a little note from my mother to me, written in large letters, to make it easier for me to decipher. I was delighted by the note, and also much impressed by this new sensation : for the first time I was conscious of speech addressed to me by somebody who was hundreds of miles away. And who was that somebody ? My mother, whom I loved so passionately, whom I was always thinking of and often grieving for. Nobody had ever before written me a single word ; and indeed, though I read print well, I could not make out writing.

It was now the fifth week of this lonely life, and my childish mind and heart began to suffer much under it. Not only my face but my whole appearance expressed a timid grief and my feeling that I was a kind of orphan. Whether I played with my sister, or read my books, or listened to Yevséitch's stories, I could not attend to anything. Often I put aside *Reading for Children* and fell into a reverie, in which my fancy painted pictures full of sadness and, later, of horror. I imagined that my mother was dying, was dead ; that my father was dead too, and that we would spend our lives at Bagrovo, beaten, and dressed in peasants' clothing, and banished to the kitchen (I had heard punishments of this kind spoken of) ;

and that at last my sister and I would both die. These pictures of fancy became more definite every hour ; and I shed floods of tears as I sat at my book over some cheerful story. Then my sister would rush to kiss me and ask the reason of my tears ; sometimes I could not answer, and she too began to cry without knowing why. Nurse had begun to be more with us, now that the young master and mistress—so my parents were called in the house—were expected home ; but she and Yevséitch were at their wits' end. The consolations usually given in such circumstances failed entirely. When asked why we were crying, my answer was, ' Mamma is certainly ill or dying ' ; and my sister said, ' I feel sad when brother cries.' My aunt was told ; and she received just the same answers when she came to see us. She begged us not to cry, and assured us that our mother was well and was expected to return every day ; but I was so convinced of the truth of my sad presentiments that I refused altogether to believe my aunt, and obstinately repeated the same answer again and again : ' You are saying all that to deceive me.' She was vexed and went away. Next day, when we went to say good morning to grandfather, he said to me rather sternly : ' I am told that you are always whimpering ; you are a cry-baby ; and the sight of you makes my little fawn cry too. Mind I hear no more of your tears.' I turned pale with fright (I was told this afterwards) ; and I did not venture to cry all that day, but I cried nearly all night. I became still more frightened of grandfather. Imitating my aunt, Yevséitch and nurse kept constantly repeating : ' Your mamma is well and will arrive very soon ; she is driving

up to the village now, and we will go to meet them.' At first these words had a powerful effect on me, and made my heart beat fast ; but soon it was pain to hear them. Two more days went by ; my sorrow increased, and I became quite unable to occupy myself in any way. My dear sister never stirred a step from me : often she begged me to play with her, or read aloud, or tell her a story. I did as she asked, but with so little inclination or spirit that I often stopped in the middle of our reading or game, and we looked at one another in silent grief with eyes full of tears. On one of these weary heavy days, one of the maids came running into our room and called out loudly, ' The young master and mistress are arriving ! ' It may be strange, but I did not believe this news at once and entirely. I was accustomed, indeed, to hear words to the same effect from Yevséitch and nurse ; still it is strange that I was so incredulous in my joy. But I thank God that it was so ; if I had been quite convinced, I believe I should have gone mad or fallen ill. My sister began to dance and cry out, ' Mamma has come, mamma has come ! ' Nurse, who for once was alone with us, asked in an anxious voice, ' Do you really mean it ? ' ' Yes, I do,' said the maid ; ' they are quite close, and Yephrem Yevséitch has run to meet them ' ; and off she ran herself. Nurse quickly put our frocks straight and brushed our hair, and led us both by the hand to the servants' room. The house door was wide open ; and my grandmother, with my aunt and two cousins, was already standing in the hall. As the rain was pouring in torrents, no one could go out upon the steps. A carriage drove up, and I caught a glimpse of a figure at the window ;

it was my mother—and from that moment I remember no more. When I became conscious, my mother was sitting on a sofa, and I was on her knee with my head laid on her breast. Ah! that was joy, that was happiness!

As soon as I had quite recovered, I wished to talk and ask questions, but my mother got up and hastened to grandfather; frightened by my swoon, she had not gone to his room and had not yet greeted him. In a few minutes Yevsitch appeared, with instructions to take me to the 'old master'. For once I went with perfect confidence: my mother was there, and in her presence I feared no one. Grandfather was sitting on the bed, with one of my parents on each side of him; grandmother occupied grandfather's arm-chair, and my aunt and cousins were also seated. I had not seen my father, or rather, I did not remember having seen him; so in my joy I sprang straight into his arms and began to embrace and kiss him. 'So you love your father too, and not your mother only,' said grandfather in a cheerful voice; 'I thought it was only her you missed. Well, Sofya Nikolayevna,' he went on, 'your little boy is a terrible cry-baby: he made us all sad and made my little fawn cry a great deal. I had to shout at him a little, and that quieted him.' My mother replied that my long illness had made me inseparable from her. My little sister was so bold that I looked at her in astonishment: when I entered the room, she ran to meet me with shouts of delight—'Mamma has come! Papa has come!'—and then, still shouting, ran from her mother to all the others in turn, and even clambered up on grandfather's knee.

My parents arrived two hours before dinner. After dinner all dispersed to lie down as usual, and we were left alone ; and I described in detail what had happened to us in their absence. I did not understand the effect which my story was bound to have on a devoted mother's heart, nor that it was doubly painful to my father to hear it. Even if I had understood, I should have told the real truth all the same, having learnt perfect frankness from my mother's training. Once or twice my mother interrupted my tale ; her eyes flashed, the colour came into her pale face, and in a voice choking with emotion she spoke to my father in language which I could not quite understand. Each time he signed to her to stop, and tried to soothe her : ' For God's sake be careful, and spare Seryozha ; what must he think ? ' And each time my mother controlled herself and made me go on with my story. When I had ended, she sent my sister and me off to the parlour, telling nurse that she wished to lie down, and we were to sit quiet and not walk about. But I soon guessed that we were got rid of because my mother wished to speak to my father with no one present. I even heard through the locked and curtained door the sound of whispering, expressive and distinct, and then a heated discussion carried on in a low voice, sometimes raised for a few words. I only half understood the situation ; but I made out that my mother was raging at our relations for their treatment of us, and that my father was taking up the cudgels in their defence. From all this I drew the conclusion that our further stay would be short ; and I was not mistaken.

Next it came to my turn to ask my parents about

their experiences at Orenburg. From their account and their conversations with others, I learnt to my great joy that Dr. Deobolt had found no sign of consumption in my mother. But he did find other alarming symptoms, for which he began to treat her. At first the treatment did her much good, but later the separation from her children was so distressing to her that the doctor had to let her go. He had given her medicines to last through the winter; and in spring she was to drink *koumiss*,¹ for which purpose we were to go to a pretty village where my father and Yevséitch and I would fish. All this brought peace and joy to me; and best of all, as others said and I could see for myself, my mother grew better and stronger. My timidity quickly passed off, and gloomy Bagrovo became a cheerful place. I thought—and perhaps it really was so—that every one there became kinder and more attentive to us, and cared more about us. In my childish mind I believed that they had all become fond of us. Even now, however, I think that during that last week of our visit grandfather did become fond of me, and that his change of feeling began from the moment when he saw with his own eyes my warm attachment to my father. He told me himself that he had taken me for a spoilt mother's darling, caring little for my father and still less for his relations, and despising every one at Bagrovo. This had clearly been suggested to him; and the old man was confirmed in these opinions by my bearing: I was not demonstrative and looked sad, and his presence was a cause of timidity and even terror. But now, when he was kind to me, when my grief and fear for my

¹ Mare's milk fermented.

mother had ceased, when my heart was light and I showed affection to him—it was very natural that he began to love me. A few days worked a complete change in me : I became lively and even mischievous ; I ran constantly to grandfather to tell him whatever came into my head, and at once gave him the treat of hearing me read my favourite book. Grandfather accepted all this with cordiality : the gloomy old man seemed to have become kind and affectionate. I remember well his admiration of the affection between my sister and me. She would be sitting on his knee, listening to my chatter or reading ; suddenly, for no reason, she would jump down, run to me and kiss me, and then climb up on his knee again. When he asked, ‘ What made you jump down, little fawn ? ’ she would answer, ‘ I wanted to kiss brother.’ In a word, there grew up between grandfather and me such loving ties and such frank relations, that every one else had to respect them and dared not interfere with them. Our cousins, who were in high favour before, now had chairs by the stove, while we sat on grandfather’s bed ; when they saw that he was taken up with us and paid no attention whatever to them, the ‘ General’s daughters ’ (as they were called) got tired of silence ; taking no interest in our conversations, they stole out of the room to the servants’ hall, where they found it much more lively.

Though my mother said nothing to me, yet I found out from her conversations, not always quite pleasant, with my father, that she had had a heated interview with my grandmother and aunt, or, to put it plainly, had quarrelled with them. ‘ Don’t blame us,’ grandmother had answered ;

'we did not venture to go near your children. We mind our own business; we are plain country people, and don't know your town ways.' But my mother's anger fell chiefly on our nurse. Agatha shed tears when rebuked, and I felt very sorry for her; but she went on telling lies all the time, solemnly swearing that she had never left us day or night, and appealing to Yevséitch and me as witnesses. When I asked, 'Why do you say what is not true, Nana?' she answered that it was a sin and a shame for me to attack her, and burst out in floods of tears. I was dumbfounded; I even wondered whether I was really guilty of false witness against Agatha; but then Yevséitch, who had caught her in the act when she was gadding all about the village, gave peace to the scruples of my childish conscience. After this scene my mother told my father that nothing in the world would induce her to keep Agatha as nurse: on our return to Ufa, she should be dismissed without fail.

Preparations for our journey were hastily begun. My father's leave of absence had come to an end, and it was now autumn. The day before our departure, my aunt Aksinya came over; my sister and I were delighted to see our kind aunt, and made much of her. My mother, before grandfather and all the party, thanked her warmly for all her kindness and attention to her godson and the little girl, and assured her that she would never, while she lived, forget what her sister-in-law had done. Young as I was, I noticed that grandmother and my aunt Tatyana were much alarmed by what my mother said. I learnt the reason later—they were afraid of grandfather. I also heard my father scold

my mother : ' A good thing,' he said, ' that my father did not hear how you thanked my sister Aksinya, and did not draw his conclusions from it ; if he had, it might have ended in mischief. Surely you have had it out already with my mother and sister, and need not bring his wrath upon them. You know we are off to-morrow.' My mother sighed and said she had lost patience and forgotten herself when she said it, and confessed that she had acted heedlessly. But when my godmother came to our room, my mother thanked her again with tears and kissed her hands.

At last our packing and preparations were complete. Grandfather took a kind farewell of us, made the sign of the Cross on us, and went so far as to say : ' It's a pity it is so late in the season ; else you should have stayed a week longer. Things were not comfortable for you this time ; I will have a separate room built for you and the children.' The others all said good-bye many times ; the kissing and embracing went on for a long time, and tears were shed. I was quite convinced that they were now much attached to us, and was sorry for them, especially for grandfather.

On our way back to Ufa, we again visited Parashino, but only for the night ; and our journey was far less agreeable. The weather was either damp or cold : it was impossible to camp out of doors, and the Choovash and Tartar villages, where we halted for meals or for the night, were not to our taste. With the Tartars we were better off, because their huts were ' white', i. e. furnished with chimneys ; but our halts in the smoky Choovash huts were beyond bearing. We started so early each morning, that we had to stop to feed the

horses at an hour when the fires were still burning in their stoves ; though the door was kept open, we were obliged to lie down on the settles, to escape suffocation from the smoke. My mother was much afraid that we would catch cold ; and we generally had a warm coverlet over us as we lay. My mother's eyes were affected by the smoke ; and it was a whole month before they got better. We drove for five days and arrived at Ufa on the sixth.

CHAPTER VIII

A WINTER AT UFA

AFTER such a long, tiresome, and fatiguing journey, I was much pleased with our spacious house at Ufa and its large high rooms, with the company of my dog Soorka who was delighted to see me again, and with freedom to run about and play and make a noise where I liked. We found in the house unexpected guests, whom my mother was very glad to see. these were her two brothers, Serghéi Nikolaitch and Alexander Nikolaitch, officers in a dragoon regiment, who were on furlough for several months. I fell in love at first sight with both my uncles : both were young and handsome, kind and merry, especially Alexander, who laughed and jested from morning till night, and kept us all amused. Having been educated at Moscow in a boarding-school connected with the University, they liked reading and could repeat poetry. To me this was an entire novelty : till then I had no notion what poetry was, or how it should be read. Besides all this, my uncle Serghéi was very fond of drawing, and drew and painted well ; he had with him a paint-box and brushes, an enchanting sight in itself to me. I liked to look at pictures, and the art of making them seemed to me something magical and preternatural ; hence my uncle Serghéi was a superior being in my eyes.

The last week at Bagrovo had done much to remove the painful impression made on me by our life there ; and also the long journey had prepared

me for the life which awaited us at Ufa ; but still I felt an indescribable happiness, which soon passed into calm confidence, when I saw what love was shown to me by my uncles and the intimate friends of my parents, and how much kindness by all their acquaintances. This feeling had such an effect on me that I suddenly ' developed ', as people said : that is, I became bolder, sturdier, livelier. All saw the change and said that I had grown in wisdom and stature. I must confess that I also became more vain and selfish, as a result of these compliments.

My uncles were put up in a room by themselves, with one door opening into the parlour and another which led through a passage-room into a large carpenter's shop. In the lifetime of my maternal grandfather, this had been his office ; but now Michéi, the husband of our nurse Agatha, a very passionate and rude man, lived and worked there at his trade as a carpenter. I hardly knew of his existence before ; but my uncles liked to go to the workshop sometimes, to tease Michéi. He got angry, abused them, chased them, and sometimes struck them with his wooden mallet ; while they were much amused and laughed heartily at his vehemence. I was amused too, never suspecting that I should have to suffer much myself from amusement of this kind.

My mother's health was obviously better ; and I noticed that we had many more visitors than we used to have. I may, however, have been mistaken ; for I was still a child the year before, and not quite restored to health, so that I took less notice of what went on in the house. I knew little of most of our visitors ; only those who came almost daily, and were devoted to all our family, were well known to

me then and are not forgotten now. I will give a list of them : old Mme Myortvavo and her two sons, Dmitri and Stepan ; the Chichagoffs ; the Knyazhevitches, who had two boys about my age ; Mme Voyetskaya, who had a special attraction for me because she was called Sofya Nikolayevna like my mother, and her sister Mlle Pekarskaya. Among officers, our most frequent visitors were General Mansuroff with his wife and two daughters, General Count Langeron, and Colonel L. N. Engelhardt ; Adjutant Volkoff and another officer, Christophovitch, were friends of my uncles, and came to the house almost daily. So did Dr. Avenarius, a very old friend of the family. We made friends with the Knyazhevitch and Mansuroff children and often played with them. The two boys were active and vigorous. Brought up hardily by their parents, they knew nothing of colds, and ate what they liked, while I, on the contrary, never dared to eat anything outside my regular diet without leave from my mother, and was not allowed to go out in damp weather. It must be remembered that I had lain in a critical condition for eighteen months ; it was not surprising that I should be watched and coddled ; but my little sister had no reason to be confined to the same strict diet and abstinence from fresh air.

Sometimes there was a dinner-party ; and then—my word ! what pains my mother took, together with our cook, Makéi, who understood his business very badly. There was one dish of almond pastry, or almond cake, which she always made herself ; and to watch the process of its production was one of my chief delights. Under my attentive eyes, she soaked the almonds in boiling water, cleaned

off the skins when they loosened, and chose out the very cleanest and whitest almonds ; then she had them pounded, if a cake was to be made of almond paste ; if not, she cut them up herself with scissors, and kneaded the cut pieces into the white of eggs beaten up with sugar, and made wonderful shapes out of them, little wreaths or crowns, or flower-heads, or stars. This was laid on an iron plate dredged over with flour, and then placed in the kitchen stove, from which it came forth just before the dinner, quite ready and baked to a turn. At a sign from me, my mother would run out of the drawing-room and put on a long white apron over her pretty evening dress ; then she would carefully remove the wonderful pastry from the iron plate with a knife, and pour raspberry vinegar over each of the little figures ; finally she placed it on a large dish, and went back to her guests. As I sat at table, I was always impatient for the appearance of the almond pastry, partly because I had a sweet tooth, but more because I anticipated with such pleasure the compliments paid to the pretty dainty by our guests, when they took up one little figure after another, and declared that for almond pastry no house could compare with Sofya Nikolayevna's. In my triumph I could not sit quiet on my high chair : I could not help whispering to my neighbour at the table, ' Mamma made it all herself ! '

I remember that our parties were gayer then than they ever were during the rest of our life at Ufa ; and yet I knew that the want of money was felt every day, and that we were poorer and lived less comfortably than our friends. Of the officers who came to the house, my favourite at first was Leo Engelhardt ; his bulk and stature made him

seem a hero among the rest, and he was handsome as well. I was a great favourite with him, and often sat on his knee, fascinated by his big voice and stories of war, and looking with awe at the two crosses which hung on his breast, especially the little gold cross with rounded points and this inscription, 'The Taking of Otchákoff. December 6, 1788.' I said that he was my favourite *at first*, because I afterwards came to fear him. He frightened me one day by saying, 'Would you like to join the army, Seryozha?' 'No,' said I, and he went on: 'You ought to be ashamed of yourself; as a noble, you are bound to serve your country with the sword, not the pen. Would you like to be a grenadier? I'll bring you a grenadier's cap and dirk.' I was terrified, and ran away from him. He took a fancy to continue the joke, and said to me next day, when he saw me keeping away from him, 'O you little coward, if you are afraid to enter the service, I will take you by force.' After that I never went near the Colonel, unless I was specially told to by my mother, and then I cried. I was confirmed in this fear by a boy who often came to the house, known as 'one-eyed Andrusha', the son of a kind woman who was devoted to our family. He was older than I, and I believed him. Later I thought that he spoke thus on purpose to frighten me.

Next to reading, I took most delight in watching my uncle Serghéi while he drew. Less fond of society than my other uncle, his younger brother, who was generally called a flirt, he often painted small pictures for me and also fairly large pictures for himself. I found it hard to wait till he sat down at the table in his room, on which I had placed

beforehand a glass of water and a clean china plate. Some time before the appointed hour, I kept close to my uncle and tried to catch his eye; if that failed, I pulled his sleeve, saying in the most beseeching voice, 'Uncle, let us go and paint.' At last he sat down at the table, rubbed his colours on the plate, and dipped his brush in the water: from that moment my eyes were riveted on his hand, and I welcomed with exclamations of joy every new leaf added to a tree, or beak to a bird, or any feature to a human countenance. Seeing my enthusiasm, my uncle took a fancy to teach me the art. With much pains he prepared models for me, circles and semicircles, large and small, shaded and unshaded, placed in squares traced beforehand; and, later, eyes, eyebrows and so on. As soon as he sat down himself to paint, he made me draw at another table. But at first the lessons were a failure, because I was constantly jumping up to watch him at work; and when he ordered me to sit still, I gazed at him with staring eyes or climbed up on my chair, hoping to get at least a glimpse. Seeing that this would be useless, he made me draw at different hours. He was not mistaken: in a short time, I was for my age brilliantly successful. He was delighted and prophesied that I would do great things as an artist. But not all prophecies are verified; and when I grew up, I could not draw even the circles which I had drawn as a child.

In the way of books, my library, which consisted of *The Mirror of Virtue* and the twelve parts of *Reading for Children*, was doubled by the acquisition of two new books—*The Child's Library*, of Shishkoff, and *The History of the Younger Cyrus*

and the *Return of the Ten Thousand Greeks*, by Xenophon. These books too were the gift of my old friend, M. Anitchkoff; and he also gave me a thick manuscript volume, of which I cannot now give even the title. I only remember that it contained a number of plans and drawings very carefully made and coloured. I did not understand it at all, but I much enjoyed turning over the leaves with my sister and explaining to her the meaning and purpose of each illustration. But I had to invent every word, as I had not the least idea what the book was about. How amused I should be now to hear the nonsense I talked then! *The Child's Library*, written by Herr Campe, and translated from the German by A. S. Shishkoff, and especially the songs for children which I soon learnt by heart, enchanted me. That was little wonder; but it is surprising that Xenophon pleased me just as much and became my favourite reading in the years that followed. Even now I recollect this book, as if it had never left my table; its appearance even is so deeply engraved in my memory that I seem to see it before me, with the ink-stains on many of its pages, the thumb-marks, and the dog's-ears on some of its leaves. The battle of Cyrus against his brother Artaxerxes, his death in the battle, the return of the Ten Thousand Greeks under the hostile observation of a great Persian army, the Greek phalanx, the Dorian dances, the constant skirmishes with barbarians, and at last the sea, their means of return to Greece, the sea which the brave soldiers beheld with such rapture, exclaiming 'Thalatta, thalatta!'—all this became so familiar to me that even now I remember it all with perfect clearness.

Such was the calm and happy current of my life during the first few months. I cannot remember exactly when it began to get rough ; the change came gradually. My two uncles and their friend, Volkoff, began to find pleasure in teasing me. Beginning with military service, they told me that an *ukáz*¹ had been published, requiring the eldest son of every noble to serve in the army. When I replied that this was a mere invention of theirs, the rogues wrote out an *ukáz* in large letters and attached a seal of some kind to it ; and this device was too much for me. My belief was due mainly to 'one-eyed Andrusha', who now came daily to the house and was probably in league with the officers. This silly jest, which went on some time, cost me no little emotion and mortification and many tears. The worst was that I, being naturally hot-tempered, resented their ridicule and began to say rude things, of which I had been incapable before. The laughter caused by my language encouraged me to carry my abuse to such lengths that I was scolded and told to apologize. But, in my childishness, I thought myself entirely in the right and refused to apologize ; so that I was made to stand in the corner and reduced at last to the necessity of asking pardon. My mother did, indeed, explain to me that it was all a joke, and that I ought not to get angry but to reply with a jest ; but here lay the trouble, that a child cannot clearly distinguish the boundary between jest and earnest. Sometimes, I disbelieved for a long time what my persecutors said, and answered them with laughter ; but then suddenly I began somehow to believe them ; and all at once I was hurt by their

¹ Imperial edict.

ridicule, lost control of myself in my rage, and paid my enemies back, as well as I knew how, with violent abuse. Volkoff caught it from me more than the others ; but the scene always ended in my discomfiture. When they tired of teasing me about the army—custom had made me less irritable on that point—they found out another means of working on an equally sensitive chord in my heart. One day, my uncle unexpectedly informed me, with a serious air of mystery, that Volkoff wished to marry my sister and carry her off with him to a campaign. I believed him, and though quite puzzled, understood this much, that it was intended to separate my sister and me and to turn her into a kind of soldier. I had never liked Volkoff, and now rage and hatred, such hatred as a child can feel, filled my heart against him. To keep up the joke, Volkoff told me next day with an important air that my father and mother had agreed to give him my sister's hand, and begged for my consent as well. This led to many sad consequences. Furious with anger, I abused Volkoff, and threatened to shoot him if he laid a finger on my sister.

Just at this time, the same gentleman had an absurd and unpleasant adventure, which looked like a punishment for his love of teasing. In my folly, I was delighted at it, and said, ' You see, God has punished him for wanting to carry off my sister.' The adventure was as follows. There was a ball at the Governor's house, on the occasion of some festival. Volkoff, with his hair powdered, and in evening dress with silk stockings and pumps, drove to our house, intending to go with my uncles to the ball. While they were dressing, Volkoff, for want of occupation, went into the carpenter's shop

and began to tease Michéi as usual, and hinder him at his work. Michéi was more out of temper than usual; at first, he kept to abuse, but soon he lost all patience and hit Volkoff such a shrewd blow with his mallet, that in one moment a huge bump rose on his forehead, and one eye was closed up. To go to the ball was out of the question. My uncles laughed heartily, but Volkoff wept with pain and vexation at missing the ball on which he had set his heart. Of course, the affair became generally known, and the sight of Volkoff raised a laugh; he was forced to keep the house for some days, and did not even visit us. For a whole month I was safe from his hateful teasing.

Earlier than this, I had heard casually that my father was buying some land among the Bashkirs; and now this purchase was legally completed. Over 19,000 acres of excellent land on the river Byélaya, thirty versts from Ufa, with a number of lakes, of which one was about three versts in length, were bought for a trifling sum. My father's description was enthusiastic and detailed: he told me of the great quantity of birds and fish in the district, the berries of all sorts, the lakes, the grand woods that grew there. His descriptions charmed me and excited my imagination so strongly that even in my sleep I talked of this new and beautiful land. In addition, in the legal documents it was called 'the Sergéyef estate', and the village, which was to be built there the following spring, was already called Sergéyevka, after me. This pleased me. The feeling of property, of the exclusive possession of anything, though it may puzzle a child, has power to interest him, and gives him a peculiar satisfaction (it was so with me

at least); and therefore, though I was not a grasping boy, I set great store by the fact that Sergéyevka was mine, and never spoke of it without adding this possessive pronoun. My mother was to go there in spring to drink *koumiss*, according to Deobolt's prescription. I counted the days and hours in anticipation of this happy event, and never tired of speaking about Sergéyevka to all our visitors, my parents, and my sister with her new nurse, Parasha.

I forgot to say that Agatha had been sent away long ago. My mother took as her own maid instead of Parasha a hump-backed woman whose name was Katerina, though she was always called 'the Princess', apparently as a joke, for there was no reason for it. She was a Kalmuck woman, who had been bought at some time by my maternal grandfather, and received her freedom after his death. My mother, out of charity, had let her live in the maids' room and given her food and clothing; but now that she had set her own maid to mind my sister, she tried 'the Princess' in Parasha's place. But it soon proved quite impossible to get on with the Kalmuck woman: she was a true Asiatic, cunning, servile, bad-tempered, and capricious, so that my mother soon grew tired of her and sent her back to the maids' room. We were forbidden to speak to her; and indeed conversation with her might have been bad for children. All her superiors, old and young, she was in the habit of flattering to their faces, and was profuse in her servility; but behind their backs her language was very different. She was constantly carrying tales against all our servants to my parents; but with the servants she abused my parents, and nearly made mischief between my

mother and Parasha. She even tried in passing to sow discord between my sister and me. I never concealed from my mother anything I heard, or indeed a single thought of my own, so, of course, I made her my confidante in this case, and she made haste to remove this dangerous creature from proximity to us. The hunchback, however, lived on in our house, always under the name of 'the Princess', to an advanced age.

When the bump produced by Michéi's mallet on Volkoff's forehead had been forgotten, he and my uncles began again to torment and tease me; and this time my dear Sergéyevka served as a very effectual means for their object. First Volkoff urged me to give him Sergéyevka; next he proposed to buy it of my father. Of course, I got angry and said various foolish things. Then they repeated their former device, again with complete success: they composed and wrote out, not an *ukáz* this time, but a contract of marriage, which stated that my parents, with my consent as the *reputed owner of Sergéyevka*, gave it as my sister's dowry to P. N. Volkoff to be his property for ever. The document was signed by my father and mother, of course with forged signatures; but, as I could not write, my uncle Serghéi had signed it for me! I, poor child, was utterly dumbfounded. I did not believe in the consent of my parents, and I knew my own dissent only too well; but at the same time I fully believed that this document, which my uncle called a title-deed, robbed me at once of my sister and of my estate. Apart from my bitter grief at such appalling losses, I was irritated and wounded in my inmost heart by such an impudent fraud. My fury went beyond all bounds and

darkened my judgement I poured out on my uncle all the abusive words I knew : I called him a cheat, a pettifogging swindler, and a thief ; and as for Volkoff, the chief culprit and criminal, I intended to shoot him without mercy, whenever I could get a gun, or hunt him down with Soorka (the house dog, as my readers may remember) ; but, not to postpone my revenge, I ran like a madman out of the room, rushed into the workshop, caught up a mallet, ran back with it to the drawing-room, and when I got close to Volkoff, hurled it straight at his face. Such are the lengths to which foolish joking can drive a good-natured and peaceable child ! Luckily, the blow was trifling ; but I was dealt with severely. A punishment, of which I knew nothing previously but by hearsay, was put in practice for my benefit. I was dressed in garments of some coarse grey stuff, shut up in a quite empty room, and made to stand in a corner, under the eye of Yephrem Yevséitch. How my dear little sister cried and sobbed when she witnessed the tragedy ! It took place in the morning ; all the time till dinner I raged and wept ; in vain Yevséitch tried to convince me that it was wrong to fly into such a passion, abuse my uncle, and fight with Volkoff ; in vain he said that it was all a joke, that little girls don't get married, and that it was impossible to take Sergéyevka from us against our will. He urged me to confess and ask pardon, but in vain : I turned a deaf ear to his advice. At last I stopped crying, but I hardened my heart and declared I was not guilty : if they did it on purpose to deceive me, that made no difference ; they ought to be punished for it by degradation to the ranks and be sent to the front ;

it was *their* duty to ask *my* forgiveness. My mother, who suffered more than I, came constantly to the door, to hear what I was saying, and to look at me through the key-hole ; but she had the firmness to stay outside till dinner-time. Then at last she came and stayed alone with me, using every effort to convince me of my fault. For a long time she went on ; her words, now tender and affectionate, now severe and monitory, but always carrying conviction, and her tears over my obstinacy, at last shook my resolution ; I confessed my fault towards her and even towards my uncle, whom I loved very much, especially for the painting ; but I refused absolutely to admit any fault against Volkoff : I was ready to beg pardon of all except him. My mother was unwilling to accept any compromise : she hardened her heart and said that I should have no dinner and stay in the corner until I was conscious of my guilt and sincerely asked pardon of Volkoff ; then she went away to dinner, at which visitors were expected. I only learnt later what I had no idea of then—the suffering which this firmness inflicted on her loving heart. But her darling’s moral good, sometimes perhaps mistakenly conceived, always counted for more with her than her own suffering, which was at that time dangerous to her health. Yevséitch was told to sit in the next room, and I was left alone. At once my imagination set to work. I imagined myself a hero and a martyr, such as I had read or heard of, suffering for truth and justice. Already I could see my hour of triumph : open flew the door ; in came my father and mother, my uncles and the visitors ; they praised my fortitude, acknowledged themselves in the wrong, and said

they had only wished to put me to the proof ; I was dressed in new clothes and taken in to dinner. Alas ! the door remained shut, nobody came in, and the only sound came from Yevséitch, who was beginning to snore in the next room ; my bright visions vanished like smoke, and I began to feel weariness, hunger, and headache. But again my imagination became busy : I fancied myself banished from home for my obstinacy and wandering through the streets at night ; no one would give me shelter ; I was attacked by fierce mad dogs (a great terror of mine) ; they were just going to bite me, when Volkoff appeared, saved my life, and took me back to my parents ; I forgave Volkoff, and my generosity gave me some satisfaction. A host of similar pictures swarmed through my brain ; and in all I played the chief part, I was the hero, in his hour of triumph or of final ruin. The word 'hero' was unknown to me then ; but the meaning of it, so seducing to a child, was clearly present in all my fancies. At last I was worn out by emotion and tears and long standing. I might, of course, have sat down on the floor, as there was no one in the room ; but I had been told to *stand* in the corner, and weary as I was, nothing would have induced me to sit down. Two hours after dinner, our kind friend Dr. Avenarius came to see me. He too urged me to apologize to Volkoff ; but I would not. He offered me a plate of soup ; but I refused. I said, ' I will eat it, if mamma tells me to ; but I don't want food myself.' Avenarius was soon followed by my mother ; I saw that she was much distressed. She told me to eat, and I did what I was told submissively, though I had no fancy for food. She asked me : ' Don't you feel

you have done wrong to Volkoff? Don't you repent of your fault and wish to apologize to him?' I replied that I was innocent as regards Volkoff, but I was ready to beg his pardon, if she told me to. 'You are obstinate,' she said; 'when you think better of it, send Yevséitch for me; then I will forgive you.' Yevséitch brought in a candle and placed it on the window-sill. My mother told him to stay with me, to sit by the door, and not to speak; then she went out. Very soon after taking food, I felt unwell: my head ached severely, and I was hot. Drowsiness began to master me; my knees gradually began to bend; at last weariness conquered me, my legs somehow slipped from under me, I sat down in the corner and fell fast asleep. I was told afterwards that Yevséitch was drowsy too, and that my father found us both asleep when he came to our room. When I woke, the doctor was feeling my pulse and head; I was very feverish, even delirious, and he ordered that I should be taken to the nursery and put to bed. When I woke, or rather, became conscious, quite late next day, I was still weak and feverish and took some time to understand the position of affairs; but at last I understood that excitement and weariness had brought on an illness. All were alarmed by my condition, and my mother was in despair. And now my dreams came true, though not for the reasons I had imagined. All felt that they were to blame: my uncle Serghéi sat by my bed and shed tears; Volkoff stood outside the door, on the verge of tears too, and not venturing to come in, for fear of exciting the patient; my father looked sadly in my face, and my mother—one look at her face showed clearly enough what sort of a night *she* had

passed ! Then the doctor came in and cleared the room, giving orders that I was to be kept perfectly quiet for the present. It took me some time to get well. Two days later, I was out of bed and sitting at a table, playing some game with my sister, who could not express her joy at my recovery. Suddenly I felt a strong desire to see my persecutors, to beg their forgiveness, and to make it up with them in such a way that no one should feel anger against me. At once I called my mother from her bedroom and told her my wish. She embraced me, with tears of joy (so she told me) because of my goodness. Volkoff was with my uncles at the time, and all three came together to my room. They kissed me and promised never to tease me again. My mother smiled and said very decidedly : ‘ Even if you do take it into your heads, I will never allow it again. I was the chief sinner, and I have been the chief sufferer. It is a lesson which I will never forget ’

When I had quite recovered my health, I was soon as cheerful and playful as ever. I soon forgot the sorrowful affair ; but I could not forget that I had been called ‘ illiterate ’, and that for this reason my uncle had signed for me the document, the so-called contract or settlement. At the time I denied the imputation ; but now I wished to remedy this defect and begged my parents to teach me writing. My uncle Serghéi offered to satisfy my desire. At first my teacher made me draw pot-hooks and hangers, which did not please me at all, because I wished to begin at once with letters ; but my uncle asserted that I should never write a good hand unless I learnt the art according to the rules, and that I must go through the

preliminary training and then set to work at copies. Resistance was useless, and I had to obey; but meantime I learnt by myself to write the whole alphabet, drawing each letter from printed books. The process of learning to write was long; my uncles' leave came to an end, and they returned to their regiment, with a firm resolve, however, to leave the army before long, as they found life at Ufa so agreeable. My uncle Serghéi, who was an excellent writer himself, at his departure urged my father, who was anxious that I should write a good hand, to get for me a teacher from the local school. This man's name was Matvyéi Vassilitch (his surname I never heard); he was a quiet and good-natured man. He wrote copies in a hand as good as print, and engaged to teach me on the same lines as my uncle. An endless prospect of pot-hooks and hangers bored me and made me idle; so, in order that I might be more ready to take trouble, Andrusha was set down to learn with me. He had begun long before me at the local school under the same teacher. This plan worked to some extent: I was ashamed that Andrusha should beat me in writing, and, as his performance was not at all remarkable, I tried to catch him up, and actually did so very quickly. Each lesson lasted two hours; and at the end of it, it was the custom of our teacher to write on our copy-books one of the following words: 'middling', 'not bad', 'satisfactory', 'good', 'excellent'. I soon noticed that Matvyéi Vassilitch was unfair; for, if Andrusha and I both wrote badly, he gave me 'not bad', and him 'middling'; but if we both wrote satisfactorily, then I had 'very good' or 'excellent', while Andrusha had only 'good'; and on the

somewhat rare occasions when my companion wrote better than I, we got identically the same mark. Observing this, I asked myself why our kind master acted thus. No doubt he likes me better, I reflected, probably because I have two sound eyes, while poor Andrusha has one goggle-eye that looks like a white button. I was soon confirmed in my belief by noticing for the first time that Matvyéi Vassilitch showed more liking for me than for my companion. All my observations and inferences I repeated at once to my parents. They exchanged glances and smiled, but said nothing to me. But soon there came a change in the verdicts upon our work. exactly the same words made their appearance in both copy-books—'not bad', or 'satisfactory', or 'good'. Then I understood that my father had probably given a hint to our teacher. But Matvyéi Vassilitch continued to the end to treat me more kindly than Andrusha.

Even now I cannot understand what causes induced my mother to send me once with Andrusha to the local school. Probably, some one advised her to do so, and the most likely person was M. Knyazhevitch; and yet, if I remember aright, his children did not attend the school. However intelligent my mother was, still, owing to her defective education, the notion of keeping her son at such a school could never have entered her head. It was a wild notion then; now things are changed; and such a thought might be intelligible in the case of any one, and might serve to explain such a step. Be that as it may, once and only once, on a day memorable to me, Andrusha and I were conveyed in a sleigh, under the supervision of Yevséitch, to the local school, which was held in a

smallish wooden house at the opposite end of the town. Yevséitch handed us over personally to Matvyéi Vassilitch, who took my hand and led me into a large ill-kept room, with much noise and loud voices coming from it, which stopped the instant we appeared. The room was furnished with rows of desks, and benches of a kind new to me ; before the front desk there stood a large square black-board, fastened upon supports of some kind, and a boy stood by the board with a pointed chalk in one hand and a dirty rag in the other. Half the benches were occupied by boys of various ages ; on the desks before them lay note-books, lesson-books, and slates. Some of the scholars were very big and tall, some very small ; many of them were in shirt-sleeves, many were dressed like beggars. Matvyéi Vassilitch led me to the front desk, where he told the scholars to make room for me at the end of the bench. He sat down himself on a chair with a smallish table before it, not far from the black-board. All this was quite new to me, and I looked on with eager curiosity. Andrusha had disappeared from my view upon entering the schoolroom. Suddenly Matvyéi Vassilitch spoke in a tone quite unfamiliar to me : in an angry voice and in a kind of sing-song, he said : ‘ Don’t you know ? Then kneel down.’ At once the boy beside the black-board placed the chalk and the dirty rag very quietly on the desk, and knelt down behind the board, where three boys whom I had not at first noticed were kneeling already. They were all very cheerful and began to scuffle and fight whenever the master turned his back to them. It was a lesson in arithmetic. The teacher went on calling up the boys from a list, one after the other. Thus

he checked their attendance at the same time; and it turned out that half the scholars were absent. The master marked the absentees on his list, occasionally adding, 'Three times absent, four times absent! That means a flogging!' I grew stiff with fear. The boys who were called up advanced to the board, where they had to write the required figures with the chalk and count them by some rule from right to left, repeating, 'Units, tens, hundreds' Many made mistakes in the counting, and it seemed to me complicated and difficult, though I had taught myself long before to write figures. Some of the scholars showed knowledge and were praised by the master; but even his praise was accompanied by words of abuse, most of which were unknown to me. Sometimes a particularly choice phrase excited a general laugh, which burst out in a moment and was hushed as quickly. When he had gone through all the names on the list and tested their relative knowledge of the subject, the master set another arithmetic lesson for next day, about the places of figures and the effect of a cipher. I did not understand it, partly from ignorance of the matter, and partly because I was sitting there more dead than alive, amazed by all that I had seen. When he had set the lesson, Matvyéi Vassilitch called in the school-keepers. Three of them came in, armed with bundles of birch rods, and set to work to flog the boys who were kneeling down. To me this scene was terrible and disgusting: as soon as it began, I shut my eyes and stuffed my fingers into my ears. My first instinct was to run away, but I was shaking all over and dared not move. The cries of the victims and the brutal comments of the

master made their way to my hearing, in spite of my stopped ears. At last they died away; I opened my eyes and found a lively noisy scene going on around me. All the boys were collecting their belongings and running out of the class-room, and the victims, running with them, were just as merry and mischievous as the rest. Then Matvyéi Vassilitch came up to me with the same friendly air as usual, took my hand, and in the old quiet voice asked me to present his humble respects to my father and mother. Leading me out of the deserted room, he handed me over to Yevséitch, who quickly wrapped me up in a *shúba*,¹ and placed me in the sleigh. Andriusha was sitting there already: 'Well,' he said, looking in my face, 'did you like the school?' Getting no reply he added, 'Not frightened, were you? It's like that every day.' When we got home, I terrified my mother, first by my speechless excitement and tears, and then by my furious denunciations of Matvyéi Vassilitch and his criminal proceedings. If my mother had had any idea of the ordinary methods in vogue at a national school, nothing would have induced her to expose me to such a violent shock. To calm and console me was utterly impossible at first: for the moment even my mother's power over me had no effect. At last, when I had described in the minutest detail all I had seen and heard, when I had vented my displeasure in the strongest expressions known to me from books and conversations, and when I had condemned Matvyéi Vassilitch to all the punishments I had ever heard of—then, and not till then, I calmed down and became able to listen intelligently to my mother's sensible

¹ Fur coat.

comments. She went on a long time, and, in order to quiet me, was obliged to allude to much that was new to me and hardly within the scope of my intelligence at that age. It was hard for me, with a child's mind and feelings, to reconcile myself to such ideas as these that the sight I had witnessed was not downright wickedness like highway robbery, for which Matvyéi Vassilitch deserved to suffer the death of a criminal; that such actions were not only permitted but required of him in the performance of his duty, that even the parents of his victims were grateful to him for his severity, and his victims themselves would be grateful hereafter; and finally that Matvyéi Vassilitch, though he raged like a wild beast and flogged his scholars, might yet remain a quiet, honest, and kind man. I was still too young for an impression so heart-rending, a lesson so terrible. It clouded the clearness and calmness of my young mind. It was long before I could get peace of mind; and to Matvyéi Vassilitch I took such an unconquerable aversion, that within a month it became necessary to stop his visits. I continued my writing lessons alone, or sometimes with Andrusha. As there was no other teacher in the town, my parents undertook the duty themselves, their chief care was that my writing should resemble the copies as closely as possible. As my mother for some reason did not altogether approve of the companionship of Andrusha, his visits became rarer. So for society of my own age, apart from the Knyazhevitch and Mansuroff children, who sometimes paid us visits and often took part in our games and amusements I was confined to the company of my dear little sister, who grew more intelligent every day, and

thus more capable of sharing all my hobbies, impressions, and amusements.

My mother's health had improved but was not quite satisfactory; and, in order that we might take advantage of the summer at Sergeevka, preparations were now made for our move. Some huts and outhouses were bought there, and during Lent these were removed and erected on a different spot chosen by my father, who went there on purpose. In spite of my earnest entreaties, my mother would not let me go with him. Sergeevka filled my thoughts to the exclusion of everything else; and my father's descriptions added fire every day to my imagination. The journey to Bagrovo, and all the beauties of nature I had seen then, were not forgotten, but only covered up to some extent by the novelty of other impressions, by life at Bagrovo and life at Ufa, but when spring came on, my warm love of nature awoke: I longed so to see the green fields and forests, the waters and mountains, to scamper over the fields with Soorka, to throw my line into the rivers, that the present lost all its interest for me, and I woke up and went to sleep every day thinking of Sergéyevka. Holy Week went by, unnoticed by me. I was too young of course to understand its deeper meaning; but I paid little attention even to what is intelligible to children—the happy faces and holiday clothes, the ringing of bells, the constant arrivals of visitors, the coloured Easter eggs, and so on. Our parish church stood high, and the snow round it had long been melting. My great satisfaction was to watch the turbid and noisy course of the spring floods as they ran past the high steps of our house; a still greater pleasure,

but one seldom permitted me, was to take a little stick and clear out the rivulets of spring water. From our steps we could see the river Byélaya, and I waited impatiently for the ice to melt. Whenever I asked my father or Yevséitch when we should start for Sergéyevka, their regular answer was, 'Oh, when the river comes down.' And at last that longed-for day and hour arrived: Yevséitch hurried to my nursery, looked in, and said in an excited happy voice, 'The river is moving!' My mother gave leave, and in a moment I was warmly wrapped up and standing at the top of the steps. There I eagerly followed the movement, between solid banks, of a huge strip of ice, blue and dark and, in some places, yellow. The ice-track across the stream had already floated some distance down, and an unlucky black cow was running, like a mad creature, from side to side of the track. The women and girls beside me greeted with cries of pity each unsuccessful movement of the distracted creature, the sound of its lowing came to my ears, and I felt very sorry for it. The river made a sudden bend behind a steep cliff, which soon concealed from us the track and the black cow rushing about on it. Suddenly two dogs were seen on the ice; but their frantic springs excited laughter rather than pity from the bystanders, as all were convinced that the dogs would not be drowned, but would make their way to the side by jumping or swimming. Glad to believe this, I forgot about the poor cow and joined in the laughter. The dogs soon justified the general expectation by getting across to the bank. Still the ice kept coming down and down in a hard, thick, unbroken mass. Yevséitch, fearing the

stretched farther than the eye could see; and directly opposite our house, it was dotted either with the tops of trees or with tall oaks, elms, and poplars half-submerged, whose height one had never before quite realized—these looked like little floating islands. It was long before the fields were clear of water; and this delay tantalized my impatience. In vain my mother assured me that she would not travel to Sergéyevka till the grass grew; I continued to believe that the river was the obstacle, and that we should not start till it had returned within its banks. At last we began to have warm, even hot, weather; the river went back to its ordinary level, resting in its sandy bed; the fields had long been green, and the woods by the river were green too—but we were still at Ufa. My father declared that it was difficult to drive over places inundated with spring floods, that the mud was terrible, and that the road in the valleys was either washed away or covered deep with slime; but all such obstacles seemed to me quite unworthy of attention. The wish to hasten our departure became with me a morbid concentration of all my thoughts and feelings upon one object. I was difficult to manage; for nothing could occupy or interest me. This might have been foreseen; and practical steps should have been taken to govern this excitability of mine, this tendency to get entirely absorbed in one idea and to rush into extremes. In later years, I have heard my mother regret that she paid too little attention to this feature in my character, which proved a serious hindrance in life and the cause of many mistakes.

I thought we should never start, when suddenly—oh happy day!—my mother told me that we

were to go to-morrow. I was half frantic with joy. My sister shared my joy, but I think her feeling was mainly caused by mine. I slept little that night. I was quite ready before any one was astir. But at last the household awoke; there was a noise of running to and fro and of packing. The horses were put in, the carriage brought round; and at last, at ten in the morning, we drove downhill to the ferry over the river. To crown my joy, Soorka was with us.

CHAPTER IX

SERGÉYEVKA

SERGÉYEVKA is one of the red-letter periods in my earliest recollections of childhood. My feeling for nature was now stronger than at the time of our journey to Bagrovo, though far less so than it became some years later. My feeling at Sergéyevka was a quiet happiness, with none of the emotion that is almost pain. All the time I spent there that year seems to me like a happy holiday.

Just as we did the year before, we crossed the Byélaya in the ferry. I found just the same sand and pebbles on the far bank, but I took little notice of them now: the picture of Sergéyevka rose before me, *my* Sergéyevka, with its lake and woods and the river Byélaya. I waited with impatience while our carriage and cart were crossing; I looked on with impatience while the horses were got ashore and put into the shafts; and the loose white sand, along which we had to crawl for more than a verst, I found very tiresome. But at last we emerged from it into the wood by the river, green and flowering and fragrant. From every side came the cheerful singing of birds; but all other notes were drowned by the whistles and calls and cadences of the nightingales. Whole swarms of bees and wasps hung buzzing round the trees in flower. Ah! how delightful it was! Traces of the recent inundation were everywhere to be seen: withered twigs and straw, coated with slime and mud already dried up by the sun,

hung in tufts on the green bushes ; the trunks of great trees were thickly plastered high above their roots with slime and sand ; and the sand, now dry, sparkled in the sunlight. ‘ Do you see, Seryozha, how high the flood came ? ’ said my father ; ‘ that elm is almost covered with the stuff washed along ; nearly all of it must have been under water. ’ My father gave me many such explanations, which I handed on to my sister, although she was sitting beside us and heard my father as well as I did. Before long the truth of his apprehensions was repeatedly confirmed : even now in many places the road was damaged or washed away by the spring floods ; and in some hollows there was such a slough that our strong horses had difficulty in dragging the carriage through it. At last we got on to firm ground ; the horses set off at a brisk trot, and at three o’clock we reached the village of Sergéyevka, as we already called it. As we approached, we again came upon low ground, dotted with bushes and trees here and there, and broken up by a number of lakes, some of fair size and all already green with rushes. Here the Byélaya, flowing about a verst distant from Sergéyevka, covered the low ground with each spring flood. Next we mounted a steepish hill, on whose level surface we found a group of peasants’ huts, new and old ; on the left, the long strip of the lake of Kuishki and the high bank on its far side were visible ; immediately opposite us lay a large and scattered Tartar village. To the right were the green water-meadows, which we had just cut across ; the pools of water sparkled like glass. We turned a little to the right and came to our ‘ manor-house ’, which was sur-

rounded by a fresh green paling. The house consisted of two peasants' huts, one new and the other old, connected by a passage; near them was the hut for the servants, still unroofed; while the rest of the enclosure was occupied by a long shed thatched with straw, to serve as a coach-house and stables. There were no steps up to our door, but two large stones had been deposited there, one on the top of the other. The new hut had no door, and no window frames, though the openings for them had been cut. My mother was not altogether pleased, and said so to my father; but I found everything much more to my taste than our town house at Ufa. My father declared that the window frames would come next day: as the weights were not ready yet, the frames would be fixed on from outside; for a door, he advised her to make shift with a rug. Then the unpacking and arrangement began: chairs, beds, and tables had come before us. We soon sat down to dinner. Our meal had been cooked beforehand on a gridiron, in a hole dug near our paling, and it tasted to us very good; in this hole it was intended to make a clay oven for our cooking in hot weather. My mother's fears were calmed: she grew cheerful, and let me go with my father to the lake, on which all my thoughts and wishes were fixed. Yevséitch went with us and carried the fishing tackle which we had ready. My mother looked at us and said laughing: 'You forgot the door and windows, but you remembered the hooks and lines.' I was so happy that I could not feel my feet under me; instead of walking I ran and jumped, so that it was necessary to hold my hands. And there it was at last, my noble

lake, which I had so long desired to see ; and noble it really was. The lake of Kushki was three versts in length and full of bays and capes ; in breadth it was very uneven, varying from 150 yards to half a verst. The far side was formed by a wooded height, which sloped gently down to the water. On the left, the lake ended suddenly in a narrow channel, by means of which the Byélaya poured into it during the spring floods. The other end of the lake, hidden by a bend of the shore, was close to the large village already mentioned, called Kushki after the lake. The Russians naturally called both, and also the new Russian village Sergéyevka, by the name of *Kishki* ;¹ and the name suited the lake very well, because it was long and crooked. The pure transparent water, the sandy bottom, the leafy woods mirrored on the surface, the green grass on the banks—all made such a delightful picture that my father and Yevséitch were charmed as well as I. Our side was especially picturesque, covered with young grass and field-flowers ; and, there being no houses there, it was free from all pollution. A score of oak-trees, of uncommon height and breadth, grew on the bank. When we got to the waterside, we saw a wooden jetty projecting over the water, and a boat moored to it ; these were fresh delights for me. Both were new : my father had arranged about them beforehand, because the water was so shallow that it would have been impossible to fish without the jetty ; it turned out very handy also for washing clothes. The boat was intended for fishing with a net. Behind the jetty stood an enormous oak, whose trunk would

¹ i. e. kidneys.

have required several men to surround it with their arms ; and near it was the tallish stump of another oak, far thicker than the surviving tree. Out of curiosity, we all three climbed on to this mighty stump, and took up only a little corner of it. My father said that twenty men could have sat on it. He made me look at the axemarks on the stump and on the tree, and told me that the Bashkirs, the real owners of the land, made marks of this kind on great oaks every hundred years. Many of their old men had assured him of this custom. On this stump there were only two marks, but five on the living tree ; as the stump was much thicker and therefore much older, it was evident that the remaining marks were on the severed part of the trunk. My father added that he had seen an oak very much thicker, which had twelve marks and was therefore 1,200 years old. I don't know how far the tales of the Bashkirs were true ; but my father believed them, and to me then they seemed gospel truth.

The lake swarmed with large fish of every kind. In flood-time the fish came in from the river ; and when the water began to fall, the native inhabitants blocked the channel of communication, which was neither broad nor deep, so that all the fish were imprisoned in the lake till next spring. Large pike were constantly jumping out of the water in pursuit of the small fry which rushed wildly before them. In places near the grass banks, there was a ripple caused by shoals of fish crowding towards the shallows and even jumping out on the bank ; I was told that these were dropping their spawn. The commonest fish in the lake were

perch and especially bream. We shook our lines free and began to fish. My father took the largest rod with a strong line, baited it with an uncommonly fat worm, and cast as far as he could ; he wanted to catch something big. Yevséitch and I had smaller tackle and small brandlings for bait. Our sport began instantly : fair-sized perch and pollen, a fish I had not seen before, took constantly. I got so excited—mad, Yevséitch called it—that I trembled in every limb and was hardly conscious of what I did. Every moment, a fish was landed and the line thrown in again ; and my shouts, and Yevséitch's attempts to instruct me and restrain my transports, caused such a din that my father said, ' It's impossible to get anything worth taking here beside you.' He got into the boat with his big rod, and rowed to some distance, where he anchored himself with a stone and a rope, and began to fish. The fish were so numerous and so easily caught, that my excitement began to cool down ; and so did my attendant's, who, to tell the truth, had been quite as excited himself. He began to consider how we could catch bigger fish. ' We must go deeper, my little falcon,' said he ; ' I'll put more worms on the hooks, and throw in a third line baited with bread.' Of course I agreed at once. We raised our floats, so that they no longer stood but lay on the water ; we put on larger worms, and Yevséitch fixed nearly a dozen on his own hook ; then he baited the third line with a piece of bread-crumb the size of a hazel-nut. At once the fish stopped taking, and complete stillness began to reign around us. Then, as if on purpose to confirm what my father had said, a big fish of some

kind took his bait; he played it a long time, while Yevséitch and I, standing on the jetty, took a lively interest in his proceedings. Suddenly he called out, 'Broken away!' and pulled up his loose line; the hook, however, was all right. 'I didn't give it time to swallow the bait,' he complained; again he baited his hook and again threw in his line. Yevséitch was much distressed. 'Dear, dear,' he said, 'no other fish will take now; the first getting away is a sure sign of bad luck.' I had not seen the fish, because my father had not raised it to the surface; nor had I felt its weight, as I was not holding the rod; and I did not understand that it was possible to judge the size of a fish by the bending of the rod. Hence I did not take the loss so much to heart, and said that perhaps the fish was a small one. For some time we sat in perfect silence, without getting a single bite. I got tired of it, and asked Yevséitch to alter my tackle to what it was at first. He did so, and at once my float turned up and the fish began to take. But Yevséitch made no change in his own tackle, and his floats lay quietly on the surface. I had now caught more than twenty fish, two of which I could not pull out without Yevséitch's help. To tell the truth, he had quite enough to do, in taking each fish off my hook, throwing it into a bucket of water, and baiting the hook again. This left him no time to attend to his own lines; and so he did not notice at once that one of the rods had vanished from the jetty, a fish having carried it fifty yards away. Suddenly he gave such a yell, that I was frightened and Soorka who was with us began to bark. Yevséitch began to beg and beseech my

father to catch the floating rod ; and my father hastened to fulfill the request : he pulled up the stone by which he was anchored, and, using the oar as a paddle, quickly caught up the rod and pulled out a very large perch, which, without unhooking it, he placed in the boat and brought over to us on the jetty. In this incident I took a much more lively interest : the anxiety of Yevséitch and his cries for help had excited me ; I jumped for joy, when we carried the perch to the bank, unhooked it, and placed it in the bucket. Apparently the fish were frightened by the noise and motion of the boat as it came near ; for they stopped biting, and we sat a long time, waiting in vain for more victims. Only towards evening, when the sun was near setting, my father caught a large bream, but kept it in the boat, for fear of frightening the fish near him : he held up his prize with both arms, that we might see it from where we were. The pollen were beginning to take with me again, when my father suddenly noticed that a mist was beginning to rise off the lake, and told Yevséitch to take me home. I was very unwilling to go ; but I had had such a delightful day's fishing already that I did not venture to ask leave to stay. With both hands helping Yevséitch to carry the bucket full of water and fish, though he did not need my help at all and was rather hindered by it, I went gaily back to where my mother was waiting. While I was fishing—either pulling out a fish, or watching the motion of the float, or momentarily expecting a bite—I felt only the excitement of fear and hope and the avidity of the sportsman ; real satisfaction and complete happiness only came now, when I

recalled all the details with delight and told them over to Yevséitch, who as a partaker of the sport knew them as well as I did, and yet, like a true sportsman, found equal pleasure in the repetition and recollection of every incident. As we went, we both spoke at the top of our voices and interrupted one another, sometimes we even stopped and set our bucket down, in order to complete some exciting reminiscence—how the float bobbed and was dragged under, how some fish resisted or broke away, then we caught up the bucket again and hastened on. My mother was sitting on the stone steps or, to speak more accurately, on the two stones which took the place of steps as an approach to our unfinished abode; she heard us coming some way off, and was surprised that we were so long in appearing. ‘What were you and Yevséitch arguing about so loudly?’ she asked, when we got close. Again I began to describe our doings, and Yevséitch joined in. Though I had noticed more than once before that my mother did not care to listen to my eager descriptions of fishing, at that moment I entirely forgot it. To confirm our story, Yevséitch and I kept pulling out of the bucket first one fish and then another; then, as this proved troublesome, we shook out all our catch on the ground; but, alas! our fish produced no impression whatever upon my mother. When my story came to an end, I noticed that a small fire was burning in front of my mother with the smoke of its few sticks blowing straight in front of her. When I asked the reason, she replied that she did not know what to do for the midges; and at the same instant she looked at my face and cried out, ‘Just look what they’ve

done to you ! Your face is all swollen and bleeding.' In fact, I was so bitten by the midges that my face and neck and hands were all swollen ; and yet, in my passion for the sport, I had never noticed it. Never in my whole life and in no place have I found such multitudes of midges ; and they were reinforced by another kind of gnat which I found even more intolerable, because it made its way into the mouth and nose and eyes. The abundance of trees and of stagnant water accounted for the number of insects. At last the midges actually routed us, and my mother and I retreated to our own room. Having no door or windows, it offered no protection ; but we sat down on the bed under an open-work canopy ; and though it was stuffy sitting under it, yet we had peace. A canopy is the only specific against the attacks of midges and mosquitoes. It was dark before my father returned ; he had caught two more large bream, and said that the fish had gone on taking, and, but for his fear of alarming us, he would have stayed all night in the boat. ' Oh, when shall I be grown up,' thought I, ' and spend whole nights with Soorka fishing on the bank of river or lake ! ' The boat, I confess, rather alarmed me.

I slept sound under the same canopy as my sister, and we rose early next morning, active and cheerful. My mother was pleased to see that the wounds, inflicted on me the day before by the wicked midges, had left hardly any trace : my face, neck, and hands had been rubbed with some stuff at night, and now the swelling had gone down and the redness and heat were less. My sister had not been much bitten, because she lay down early under our canopy.

The practical arrangement of our half-nomad life now began ; and the chief thing to arrange was the special preparation of the *koumiss* and the regular use of it. For this purpose, it was necessary to have an interview with a Bashkir chief, Mavlyoot Iséitch—he was addressed thus, but spoken of as Mavlyootka—who was one of the landowners who had sold Sergéyevka to us. He lived either in the village of Kúshki or very near it ; for, when my father sent to arrange an interview, the messenger returned very soon with the answer that Mavlyootka would come at once. And in fact we had hardly drunk our tea when a surprising figure, huge and shapeless, appeared on horseback at our gate. The figure rode up to the paling, dismounted easily, hitched his horse to the hedge, and rolled into our enclosure. We were sitting on our steps ; my father walked to meet our guest, held out his hand, and said, ‘ *Salaam malikum*,¹ Mavlyoot Iséitch.’ I gazed open-mouthed. Before me stood a man of vast height and bulk—I heard afterwards that he stood over seven feet high and weighed more than thirty stone—he wore a Cossack tunic and very baggy plush trousers ; on the very top of his huge head was stuck a Tartar skull-cap, embroidered with gold but much stained. He had no neck at all, there being no transition between the head and the vast shoulders. When I saw his great sword trailing on the ground, I could not help being afraid ; I thought at once that the cunning Tissaphernes, commander of the Persian army which fought against the Younger Cyrus, must have been like that. I whispered this surmise of mine to my sister, and then to my

¹ For the Arabic *salamun* ‘*alaikum*, ‘Peace be on thee !’

mother. When my mother laughed heartily, my fears vanished. Mavlyootka sat down with some difficulty on a seat which was brought out for him ; tea was offered him, and he drank cup after cup. The business of preparing the *koumiss* for my mother, about which she inquired herself, was very simply and conveniently arranged. One of Mavlyootka's seven wives was appointed on the spot to discharge this duty : she was to come to us daily, bringing a mare with her to milk the right quantity from the mare, and to ferment the milk in our pans, under my mother's eyes. My mother was most particular in insisting on perfect cleanliness in the preparation of the *koumiss*. The payment was settled, and something was paid in advance to Mavlyootka, which, as I noticed, pleased him very much. I could not help laughing when I heard my mother trying to speak broken Russian like Mavlyootka in talking to him. Then followed a conversation between my father and the chief, which attracted all my attention ; from it I learned that the land bought by my father was claimed by other Bashkirs than those who had sold it to us ; that it was necessary to turn the people of two villages off this land ; that when a government survey was made, there would be many disputes ; and that we ought to get our own surveyor at once. ' The surveyor will settle it all,' said Mavlyootka in his squeaky voice and in the queerest Russian ; ' white boundary-marks¹ are needed ; I'll come myself for the survey.' Then Mavlyoot Iséitch departed ; he unhitched his horse, of which he said, among other things, that it was the only horse he had which could

¹ See p. 201.

carry him ; next he put on his conical woollen cap, got into the saddle with singular agility, cracked his fearsome whip, and rode off home. I had good reason to mark this conversation between the Bashkir chief and my father. When alone with my mother, he looked anxious and unhappy while discussing the matter, and I discovered that my mother had never approved of the purchase, because the land so acquired could not become our property without much delay and annoyance. It was already occupied by the people of two villages ; and, though their tenure was only that of squatters, it was very difficult to transfer them to other land belonging to the Crown. But what she disliked most was the disagreement between the Bashkirs who had sold it : each of them claimed to be the real owner and called all the rest impostors. The account I give here was due to later knowledge ; at the time I could not understand the real facts : I only feared that people would quarrel and fight and possibly come to blows over the land. I had a presentiment that *my Sergéyevka* would not long be mine ; and I was not mistaken.

Our half-nomad existence got more and more settled every day. The window frames were brought and, for want of the weights, nailed on firmly enough from outside ; but there were no doors, and we continued to use carpets instead, which seemed to me just as good. A large new white Kalmuck tent was placed in the yard ; the side-curtains of felt could be raised, and then the tent with its framework looked like an immense umbrella with a round hole at the top. To keep down the number of flies in our rooms, we generally

had dinner there and raised one side of the tent, the side which was in the shade. The making of the *koumiss* was managed very well, and my mother got to dislike it less; but I felt an invincible aversion to it, or at least assured myself and others of this, though my mother was very anxious that I should drink it, as I was very thin and all thought it would make me fatter; but I proved refractory. My sister too could not endure it; to her it was positively injurious. To confess the truth, I think that I might have got accustomed to it; but I was afraid of losing the best time for fishing, if I drank *koumiss* and took the morning walks which were an essential part of the treatment. The passion for fishing steadily grew stronger; merely from fear that my mother would forbid me to sit by the lake with my rod, I forced myself to work at reading, writing, and the first two rules of arithmetic, under my father's teaching. I became rather artful at concealing my thoughts, and often started long discussions with my mother, while all the time my one thought was how soonest to escape with my line to the jetty, and every moment of delay was a sore trial. The fish were taking wonderfully: there were no bad days, or only to this extent that sometimes we got few large fish. My little sister sometimes went with her Parasha to fish, but found no pleasure in it and was soon driven home by the midges.

- At last we began to have visitors. Once there was a fishing party; General Mansuroff, the kindest of men and devoted to all forms of sport, was there with his wife; so was Ivan Bulgakoff, with his wife too. A great expedition to drag the lake was planned; the net was got, I think, from

the Bashkirs, and also some boats. Two of the largest boats were lashed together and covered with planks laid across and nailed down so as to form a little raft, with a place for the ladies to sit on. In the stillness of a wonderful moonlight night, we all, except my mother, set out for the water. I sat with the ladies on the raft. Quickly and cautiously the net was brought up and let down into the water, so as to surround a long reach of the lake where the bank was shaped like a prolonged semicircle. Countless shoals of bream came to the shallow water there at night. As soon as the sides of the net had been drawn close to the bank, the multitude of imprisoned fish began to be evident; from the raft we watched the centre of the net, where such a commotion was soon visible that our ladies, and I with them, uttered cries of excitement; many large fish, chiefly pike, leaped over the top of the net or dashed into the narrow space between the sides and the bank. Then the fishermen, who had been silent till now while dragging the net or drifting in boats beside it, began to shout and slap the water with the net-ropes, in order to force the fish back into the centre of the net. We got the raft ashore quickly, to watch the process of drawing out the catch. For a wonder, I did not share the general excitement and so was able to watch attentively the whole lively and animated scene. Mansuroff and my father were more excited than any one else. My father, who acted only as manager, was constantly calling out: 'Keep the edges even! Get the bottom ropes closer together! See that the centre does not get out of place!' Mansuroff went beyond mere words. He waded

knee-deep in the water, caught hold of the bottom ropes of the net, and dragged them along, pressing them at the same time against the shallow bottom, for this purpose he had to bend double and walk backwards. His wife (a sister of Bulgakoff) and Bulgakoff's wife, in spite of their excitement over the fishing, laughed heartily at the ridiculous figure he thus presented. At last, whole heaps of dripping meshes, forming the sides or wings of the net, were brought out and thrown down, and the centre appeared, not long and narrow as when empty, but broad and round, owing to the multitude of fish it contained. It soon became difficult to draw the net along the shallows; and the risk of breaking the centre made it necessary to stop. Then the upper ropes were held up high, to prevent the fish from leaping over; and men with buckets and pails dashed into the water and caught hold of the fish which were forcing their way into the sack-like centre and filling it to bursting. The men filled whatever they carried with fish, rushed to the bank, shook out their victims on the ground, and dashed back for more. When the weight of the draught was thus lightened, the whole party caught hold of the top and bottom ropes with a will, and with a loud shout drew the centre out on to the bank. We caught so much more than we expected, that we had to send for a cart. Most of the fish were gold and silver bream, which sparkled bright in the moonlight; but there were also pretty large tench and dace and perch; the pike had all managed to scramble out, thanks to their cunning, said the fishermen. What a scene it was of bustle and excitement and noise! The ladies too were keenly interested. Many a time

I heard Yevséitch call out, 'That's something like a bream! As big as a shutter!' ¹ But it seems that I was a born angler; for even then I kept saying to Yevséitch, 'If only we could land a bream like that with the rod!' I even felt depressed by the netting of so many big fish which might have taken our bait; I felt sad to see the lake emptied in such a way, and said to Yevséitch that we should never have such good sport again; but he comforted me by declaring that we should do just as well as ever—the lake was large and the stock of fish enormous; and our jetty was a long way from the place where the net had been drawn. 'You shall see for yourself to-morrow, my little falcon,' said he; and I was quite reassured and able to take a more lively interest in what was going on. By degrees order was restored: the cart was filled with large fish, and the rest were carried in buckets and pails. All the company walked merrily home behind the loaded cart; and merriest of all was General Mansuroff, though he was covered with mud and wet nearly to the waist.

My mother was sitting out-of-doors, with the samovar and tea-things before her, and a fire burning to keep off the midges. Loud and lively voices told her of our exploits; but she was astonished at our excitement, refused to understand it, and made fun of us, especially of the fat wet general, who positively refused to change his clothes. She first made sure that my feet and clothes were dry; then she gave me tea and put me to bed under the same canopy as my sister,

¹ These 'shutters' are fitted to stoves and must have rounded edges.

who had long been asleep. When she went back to our guests, I went blissfully to sleep under the canopy, thinking of the recent sport, hearing, through the rug which served as a door, the sound of loud laughter and merry talk, and dreaming of next morning, when Yevséitch and I would be sitting on the jetty with our rods. Next day I woke earlier than usual and saw that my mother was up already : she was about to drink her *koumiss* and take her walk in our enclosure and along the road leading to Ufa. My father was up too, but our guests were still asleep. The ladies occupied the only spare room, next our own and divided only by a partition ; the men lay in the barn on a thick bed of hay covered over with skins and sheets. I dressed quickly and ran to my mother, to say good morning and to ask leave to fish. She gave it without the least demur, and I, leaving my tea untasted, hastened with Yevséitch to the lake. Yevséitch had spoken the truth ! Never had the fish taken so well as that morning. ‘ There you see, my little falcon,’ said Yevséitch ; ‘ there are more fish than ever. That net last night frightened them, and they have all come here.’ Whether this inference was true or not, the fish took splendidly. Strangely enough, my passion for the sport was soon cooled by the thought that we could never dispose of all the fish, when what we were taking now was added to all that had been caught the night before. In later years I had this feeling still more strongly, and my enthusiasm was always cooled by it. I imparted my doubts to Yevséitch ; and he said it was all right, and that all the fish would be dried or smoked that very day. Though this

explanation consoled me a little, yet I returned home much earlier than usual.

Our guests stayed two more days with us. Mansuroff could not rest content without sport of some kind, and in the evening of the same day he went out with my father and Theodore, Parasha's husband, to snare quails with a net and a reed-pipe. Though I was very anxious to watch them, my mother would not let me go. Theodore brought me back a live quail, which I put in a cage plaited by Yevsitch out of green twigs. Next day Mansuroff went out shooting, again accompanied by my father, and took with him two setters which he had brought to the house. The sportsmen brought back some ducks and ten couple of snipe, all of which I surveyed with close attention. I did not venture even to ask leave to accompany the shooters: though I could see no reason why I should not take the field myself with Soorka, still it was certainly out of the question for me to tramp behind the sportsmen over hillocks, bogs, and reed-beds. To make up for this, our guests both came with me every evening to the lake to fish; but, for want of skill, they caught little, and were so fiercely attacked by midges, especially at sunset, that they often dropped their lines and ran home; and I had to go with them, though very unwillingly, as the midges had ceased to have terrors for me.

At last our guests departed, having made my parents promise to come in the course of a few days to Almantayevo, an estate belonging to Bulgakoff, about twenty versts from Sergéyevka; Mansuroff, with his wife and children, would also be there. I was glad when our guests went away,

and not at all pleased by the prospect of this visit ; but my sister was delighted at the thought of seeing her little friends and acquaintances of Ufa : the Mansuroff girls were her friends, the others only acquaintances.

Throughout my childhood and for some years later, this peculiarity was noticed in me, that I did not make friends with other children and found their presence tiresome, even when it did not interfere with my outdoor occupations, to which even as a child I was passionately devoted. This peculiarity got me credit for unsociability, shyness, and timidity : people said that I was *afraid* of strangers. Such accusations I always resented ; and they certainly served to increase my discomfort in society. This peculiarity was not natural to me—in later years I was very sociable and outspoken to a fault—but was probably due to my long illness, which brought with it separation and solitude ; for such a life forces even a little child back upon himself and confines him to an inner world of his own, which it is difficult to share with those who are not in the secret. It was due still more to my habit of constant reading. My knowledge was beyond my years, and I was not satisfied with the society of children of my own age ; yet for older people I was myself too young.

My mother's health was now evidently better. In addition to her daily walks every morning and every evening she often went for a drive through the country, especially on cloudy days, taking my father and sister and me with her on a long country car, a vehicle with which I had already become acquainted at Parashino. She found these

drives tiresome, but believed that they did her good ; indeed, they had been prescribed by the doctors as part of her treatment. To my father too the drives were wearisome ; but I disliked them most of all, because they interfered with my fishing and sometimes robbed me of the best part of the day. My mother seldom let me go to the lake with my father or Yevséitch before she came back from her morning drive ; and it was just the same in the evening ; yet almost every day I found time to fish

In the middle of June the weather became very hot and put a new obstacle in the way of my amusement. For my mother was afraid of the effects of the midsummer sun. One day she noticed that my neck was red and covered with small pimples, as if it had been blistered, this was, no doubt, due to the sun ; and she gave orders that I was always to be indoors by ten o'clock in the morning. How I prayed to God for cloudy days ! For on such days I was allowed to fish on till dinner, and the fish also took more greedily. That was real bliss—to sit at peace on the jetty with Yevséitch, to bait my line and cast it, to keep an eye on the floats, without being disturbed by the thought that it was time to go home. From time to time I glanced at Soorka, who was always sitting on the bank or lying asleep in the sun. On the other hand, in reading, writing, and arithmetic I made very slow progress, and my childish games with my sister began to lose interest and pleasure for me.

A week later, we went to the Bulgakoffs at Almantayevo. The place did not please me at all, as might have been expected from my un-

My vanity was pricked by what she said: I plucked up courage and said that I was not afraid. All the company came out on the steps to watch; a pony was brought round, I was placed in the saddle, and the reins were put in my hands. While Yevséitch continued to lead my horse, I mastered my fear, but as soon as he let go the bridle, I lost my head entirely and dropped the reins; and for want of a guiding hand the pony trotted off towards the stable. Fear now got the better of vanity, and I began to scream. I lost my balance and would inevitably have fallen off, but for a groom who ran to meet me and stopped the steady old animal. The laughter of all on the steps hurt my childish vanity: utterly crushed, as soon as I was taken off the horse, I rushed through the back door to our room. I wept inconsolably for a long time, and could not look any one in the face the whole day. This incident is especially memorable to me, because it was the first time in my life that I was conscious of anger against my parents. 'Why do they join in the laugh at me?' I asked. 'Can they not see how hurt and ashamed I am? Why does my sister not laugh? She is sorry for me and even cries.' For the first time I recognized with sorrow my own cowardice, and my peace was long troubled by the thought. Luckily we left the house next day: my mother had wished to stay another day, but the *koumiss*, of which we brought a whole cask with us in ice, had curdled so that she could not drink it. Oh with what joy I returned to my dear Sergéyevka!

Sergéyevka pleased me more than ever, though, to tell the truth, the only good points about it were

it myself. But when the Bulgakoffs with their children came to visit us, I felt a sudden stab at the heart. I thought that they would begin to laugh, as soon as they saw me; and, though this did not happen at our first meeting, yet I was so confused by the constant expectation of their mockery, that I was always blushing for no reason. But thank God, all had forgotten my shame except myself. Our guests stayed several days. In the absence of Mansuroff, that kindest and most amiable of men, our amusements did not catch on, though we dragged the lake (by day, and therefore, of course, with less success), and went out shooting one day, and angled all together on the lake. All, however, were merry except me. I saw our guests off, young and old, with secret joy, though the young people were very kind and good-natured.

When he was seeing our guests off, my father took a fancy to draw a net through a famous reach for fish on the river Byélaya, which flowed half a verst from our house. He was very anxious to catch sturgeon, and even said to me, 'Just fancy, Seryozha, if we found a salmon or a royal sturgeon in the net!' I declared that we were certain to do so. We drove off after dinner, with a whole train of wagons holding the net, two boats, and all our men-servants. The Byélaya is not broad there, above the point where the Oorshak and the considerable stream of Ufa fall into it; but I liked it better than near the town: there was less sand, and the river bed was more compact, and the banks much more picturesque. My father took his gun, and, sure enough, we met a whole covey of partridges on the way; he fired, and two fell. This first discharge of a gun at game, in my presence

and very near me, produced a strong impression on me—not fear, but a kind of pleasant excitement. When I saw the shot partridge, and especially when I was carried away by the example of others and rushed in pursuit of the wounded bird, I felt an eager delight which was new to me. What had become of my former tenderness of heart? These pretty birds, fluttering and bleeding, aroused no sympathy in me.

We had hardly time to lower the net before a whole crowd of Meshtchers¹ came hurrying to the place, shouting loudly and arguing that we had no right to fish in the Byélaya, as its waters were already let to fishermen. As my father did not wish to quarrel with near neighbours, he ordered the net to be taken out, and we had to set off home empty-handed. Our servants were so dissatisfied and so unwilling to give way, that my father's orders were not instantly obeyed; and, but for his presence, they would certainly have come to blows. I too was much vexed, in spite of a vague feeling that our disturbers were in the right; and the two dead partridges, which I held in my hands, were my only consolation.

The wild strawberries had long been ripe; and we were allowed to eat as many as we liked. My mother was very fond of these berries herself, but was forbidden by the doctors to eat them during her cure. Instead of her former aimless expeditions, she now began to drive about the country, especially the fallow lands, for berries. This amusement, which was an entire novelty to me, gave me much pleasure at first. I soon grew tired of it, but all our household, both men and women, devoted themselves

¹ See note to p. 24.

with enthusiasm to this occupation. Every soul in the house went out to pick strawberries : the only exception was Makéi, our cook ; and even he got leave after dinner, and always returned in the evening with a large basket of splendid berries. Pails and baskets of all sorts and sizes were used to hold them : each picker suited himself. As a rule, my mother soon tired of picking ; then she got into the car, made for the road, and drove about for an hour or more, after which she came back to us. At first she took my father with her ; but after a few days I begged to go, and after that she always took me in the car with her. My sister and I had pretty little baskets of birch bark, with lids and a pattern carved on them. My dear little sister was not a good picker : I mean that she could not distinguish ripe strawberries from unripe. I often heard her nurse Parasha, who was always very kind and good-natured, saying, as she shook out the child's basket, ' Well, I declare, green ones again ! ' and then she would fill the little basket out of her own big one. But I claimed that I was a skilful picker, and that my strawberries were finer than Yevséitch's, which was certainly not the case. To support my claim, I always revealed that my sister had not picked for herself, and said I had seen Parasha giving up her own berries to her. On our return home, the fruit afforded a new occupation. All the berries were emptied out into a large clean trough of linden-wood ; then the largest were picked out for jam, the next in size for eating, and the next for bottling ; the rest were used to make either Russian or Tartar pastry : for the former, which was thick, the fruit was mixed with honey or sugar and passed through a strainer ; the

latter was thin as a wafer, and, having all the seeds of the berries in it, was rather-sour to taste. These operations interested me at first almost more than picking, but at last I got tired of them. I liked best to watch my mother making jam in bright copper pans over a gridiron with a fire beneath, perhaps because the sugary scum taken off the boiling pan was mostly given to my sister and me. We two usually sat on the ground with our legs tucked away beneath us, waiting with impatience till the mixture of fruit and sugar should begin to swell and bubble and form a whitish skin over the pan.

My father went out sometimes to catch quails with nets and reed-pipes. My mother would not give me leave to go, though I often asked for it. When I had stopped asking, she quite unexpectedly gave me leave for once to go with my father and Theodore to watch this sport. I was delighted by it. When the quails came running at the low note of the pipe, and got close to the net spread out on the grass, and when we three sprang up and a startled quail, as it rose, got into the net, I was much excited. But I wanted to take a more prominent part—in fact, to decoy the birds myself. I had learnt already to blow the pipe from Theodore, who was considered a capital hand at it; and I at once fancied that I was equally skilful. My father and Theodore could not resist my entreaties, and my wish was granted. But experience showed that I had no skill at all: when I piped, the quails were so far from coming to the net that they did not even answer my calls. I was much hurt and did not ask leave another time to go with the sportsmen.

The time for drinking *koumiss* as a medicine was

now coming to an end. As the grass had reached maturity and was beginning to wither in some places, the mare's milk was losing its healing virtue; and we returned to Ufa at the end of July. The *koumiss* and country life had done much for my mother. Sorrowfully I left Sergéyevka, and said good-bye to its splendid lake and the jetty where I used to fish and which I knew so well, and the very look of which lives to this day in my grateful recollection; I said good-bye to the magnificent oaks, under whose shade I often sat, and which I always looked at with admiration. I said farewell—and it proved a long farewell.

CHAPTER X

OUR RETURN TO TOWN LIFE AT UFA

OUR two months on our country estate—or, more accurately, in our half-built little house by the lake—with pure air, and freedom, and fishing, for which I had a passion such as only a child can feel, were so different from our town life, that Ufa was repulsive to me. I came back brown as a berry, and all our acquaintances declared that I was a perfect little savage. Our garden offered me no attractions: I would not look at it, even when my dear little sister was running about there quite happily. In vain she called me to run and play with her, or to admire the flowers with which the beds were filled as usual. I even got angry with my little companion, and pointed out to her that, after Sergéyevka with its oaks and lake and fields, our garden with its stunted apple-trees was a disgusting sight. Occasionally I went out, only to stroke and caress Soorka and play with him: life at Sergéyevka had brought us so close together that the mere sight of the dog was pleasant to me, because it reminded me of my blissful life in the country. Meanwhile, because my sunburn did not pass off, my mother began to give me some treatment for it; I was much vexed, and submitted very reluctantly. I could not go back at once to my former occupations and amusements: I considered that I had grown out of them. Writing I found a nuisance, because my success with it was small, in the absence of a teacher; and I did

not feel inclined for reading, as I had long ago read all my books more than once, and had learned much of them by heart. For about a week, I was listless and idle; then I began to write, under compulsion, and to read my old books, which soon gave me pleasure. M. Anitchkoff continued to inform himself of what I was doing. He invited me again to visit him, put me through a second examination, and was so much pleased with the result, that he gave me a pile of books which Yevséitch could hardly carry; it was quite a small library in itself. The books included *The Library of Antiquity*, the *Rossiad* of Cheraskoff, and a complete collection of the works of Sumarokoff in twelve volumes. After a glance at *The Library*, I left it undisturbed; but the other two books I read with eager rapture. One of my uncles was fond of reciting poetry; I was infected by his example and tried to imitate him. My parents were evidently pleased with my recitation; for they made me display my powers before our visitors, who were much fewer than in the preceding winter; my uncles were with their regiment, and some of our most intimate friends had left the place. My mother was in better health than before and less taken up by society; thus she had more leisure, and I was with her more. My chief pleasure was to read the *Rossiad* aloud to her, while she explained words or phrases which I could not understand. I read with such eager sympathy, and my fancy reproduced the faces of my favourite heroes, Mstilavsky, Prince Koorbsky, and Paletsky, in such lively colours, that I seemed to see them and counted them as old friends. I drew pictures of them, filled in the details of their lives, and eagerly

described their appearance ; I narrated in detail what they did before battle and after battle, and how the Tsar took counsel with them and thanked them for their brave deeds, and so on. My mother laughed to hear me ; but my father was surprised, and said one day, ' Where do you get all that from ? You must not turn out a little liar.' ' Never mind,' said my mother ; ' it won't last.' Nevertheless, she would not let me describe to our visitors the domestic life of my three favourites. What a masterpiece I thought the description of Prince Mstilavsky !—

This hero in the fight was neither rash nor bold ;
Tough as the flint was he ; and, as the flint seems cold
But flashes into flame when rubbed against the steel,
So, when opposed, the Prince flashed fire from head to heel.

Gidromir and Astalon were my personal enemies, and I was grieved to the heart that Gidromir was not killed in the single combat with Paletsky. I was delighted, too, when the Cossack horsemen,

With swords that flashed like sunbeams in their hands,
And daggers pressed between their teeth, rushed down
And drove our warriors o'er the field in flight.
Even as a flock of swans hides from the hail,
So o'er the hills our soldiers fled their swords ;
And soon the enemy had stormed our camp,
Had not our champions forth to meet them fared,
That princely pair, and stopped the bloody fray.

The last two lines I pronounced with pride and joy ; and I must confess that I still feel satisfaction in pronouncing them, and find in them something strong and stirring. I did not omit to display my powers as a reciter of the *Rossiad* to my patron, M. Anitchkoff ; he heard me to the end, and then praised me and promised to give me the works of Lomonossoff.

All was quiet and peaceful in the town and in our household, when suddenly an event took place, which, not by its own importance but by the universal impression it produced on others, forced me to share in the general excitement. One fine autumn day—it was either Sunday or some festival—we had been at Mass in our parish church dedicated to the Assumption of the Virgin, and were returning home. We had just mounted the high steps outside our house, when suddenly we noticed some commotion and loud talking among the people returning from church. Next, along the street at full gallop came a Cossack orderly; to all whom he passed he cried out, ‘Go back to the church, to take the oath of allegiance to the new Emperor!’ At the church he drew bridle. The people had been scattering; now they stopped, formed groups, and walked back. Their numbers grew and grew, till they reached the church in a dense crowd. Even before one of the hurrying crowd had told us the news that the Empress¹ was dead, the cathedral bells began to ring, the bells of ten other churches chimed in, and the sound spread all over the town. My parents were much affected: my father even shed tears; my mother, with tears in her eyes, crossed herself and said, ‘The kingdom of heaven be hers!’ I was much impressed, without knowing why. All the household joined us on the steps, with dismay and grief depicted on every face; the people walking along the street were weeping. A clerk came from the law-court, out of breath with haste, and told my father he was to go to the cathedral, to take the oath. My father

¹ The Empress Catherine died in November, 1796, when Aksakoff was just five years old.

hastily put on his uniform and left us. I went with my mother to her bedroom, and my sister came too, quite aware that something had happened. My mother prayed for a time ; then she sat down in an arm-chair and gave herself up to sorrowful thought, while we two sat on a stool opposite to her and looked at her with silent attention. At last she took notice of us and began to talk to us, to me especially ; for my sister was still too young to understand her and soon went off to the nursery and Parasha. Suiting her words to my age, my mother explained that the Empress Katerina Alexyéevna was wise and good, and during her long reign had tried to improve the condition and education of all her people ; that she knew how to choose good men and brave generals ; and that during her reign our neighbours had not hurt us, and our soldiers had won victories and gained glory. Of all this I had some inkling already, but I understood it better now, and I felt very sorry for the death of the Empress. ‘ Who will be our Empress now ? ’ I asked. ‘ We shall have an Emperor now, her son, Pável Petróvitch.’¹ ‘ And will he be as wise and good ? ’ ‘ That is as God pleases ; but we shall pray that he may be,’ she replied. I said, ‘ God will surely wish Pavel Petrovitch to be wise and good.’ To this she made no reply, but told me to go to the nursery and read or play with my sister. I begged her to explain what was meant by ‘ the oath of allegiance’, and when she had done so, expressed a firm intention to take the oath myself. ‘ The oath is not administered to children,’ said she ; ‘ go and join your sister.’ I felt hurt.

¹ The Emperor Paul was hardly sane, and was assassinated 23 March 1801.

My father soon came back, and was followed by some of our friends. They were all hot against V., our military governor or commander of the troops—I am not sure which—for his open display of joy at the death of the Empress; he had ordered the bells to be rung all day, and had invited all the town to a ball and supper at his house in the evening. I felt sure at once that Governor V. could not be a good man. I now heard that he had personal reasons for rejoicing: he was a favourite of the new Emperor and hoped to rise high under his reign. This increased my displeasure with him: what business had he to be glad, when every one else was sorry? At first my mother said it was impossible to attend the Governor's ball, and others agreed with her; but then they turned round and all said that it was impossible to stay away. My mother did not oppose them, but said that she would stay at home. My father went, but soon returned, saying that it was more like a funeral than a ball: only four people there were enjoying themselves, the Governor, his two *aides-de-camp*, and the old Commissioner Anitchkoff, my kind book-giver, who could not forgive the late Empress for dismissing the Imperial Commission which she had summoned to investigate the laws. 'High time,' said the old gentleman, 'for a masculine hand to grasp the sceptre of government.'

This was a day which brought me new and strange ideas, and forced unfamiliar feelings upon me. When I lay down in my crib at night, and the curtains of my canopy were drawn, and all grew still around me, my fancy brought before me a striking scene—the dead Empress, of more than human stature, lying under a great black canopy.

in a church hung with black (I had overheard talk of this kind); and the new Emperor, another gigantic figure, kneeling beside her and weeping, while behind him all the people were sobbing aloud, assembled in such numbers that they would have stretched from Ufa to Zubofka, i.e. ten versts. Next morning I told my waking dream to my sister and Parasha, as if I had seen it all myself or read a description of it.

For a long time, people went on talking about the death of the Empress: at first, indeed, the gossip grew every hour. The talk went on in my mother's bedroom, in the drawing-room, and even in our nursery, where Annushka, Yevséitch's wife, and the hunchbacked 'Princess' looked in from time to time from their own quarters. In the bedroom and drawing-room the common theme was the changes in the government which must inevitably come about; and it was said that the Emperor would remove all his mother's favourites, whom he could not endure for their bad treatment of him. I often heard a phrase which was then a complete mystery to me: 'The sun is shining now on the Gatchina¹ people.' In our nursery the talk was different: in fact, only rumours found their way there from kitchen and pantry, where the favourite topic was the sudden death of the Empress, with the addition of horrible details which frightened me exceedingly. I ran to my parents for explanations, and was only calmed by their strong and positive assurance, that all these rumours were utter nonsense and mere gossip. Back I ran to the nursery, where I tried hard to

¹ Gatchina was the place where the future Emperor Paul used to drill his regiment.

convince Parasha and her visitors of the folly of their stories. But I failed utterly: they only replied that I was too young to understand. I was much hurt and very angry. I learnt later that Parasha and the rest had strict orders for the future to tell me nothing of the idle stories that were current among the people.

News of changes was expected every day; but Ufa was so remote that information took long to get there from the capitals.¹ The Governor soon left; and it was whispered that he had been secretly summoned by the Emperor.

Severe winter weather soon set in, and we were permanently confined to our nursery, where we occupied only one of the two rooms. With more time on my hands, I naturally gave more to reading, writing copies, and arithmetic, which I disliked and found difficult; fewer visitors came; and it was impossible to take walks. A day came when I had to fall back on *The Library of Antiquity*.

Once, in the middle of some conversation, I caught some words about 'illness' and my 'grandfather'; but I do not think any one was alarmed by his condition, and I had nearly forgotten it. But one day, when we were all sitting at dinner, my father received a letter brought by special messenger from Bagrovo. He unsealed it and began to read; then he burst into tears and handed it to my mother. She read it and was much affected, but not to tears. We hurried through our dinner, and I noticed that my parents ate nothing. After dinner they went to their room, sent us away, and had a long conversation, when we were allowed to come back, my father was getting

¹ Petrograd and Moscow.

ready to drive somewhere, and my mother said to me, looking vexed as well as grieved : 'Seryozha, we are all going to Bagrovo ; your grandfather is dying.' I heard her with sadness and bewilderment. I knew already that every one must die ; and death, which I understood in my own way, seemed to me an evil spirit and a horrible thing, of which I was afraid even to think. I was sorry for grandfather ; but I was resolved not to see him die, nor to be listening in the next room when he should begin to cry and call out, at the moment of death. I was dismayed by another thought, that it would surely make my mother ill. 'And how can we,' I thought, 'travel in winter ? My sister and I are still little, and we shall be frozen.' Thoughts of this kind took a firm hold on me ; and I sat in silence, anxious and distressed to the bottom of my heart, and giving myself up to the dismal pictures of my excited imagination, which got more and more beyond my control. Apart from my fear that grandfather would die in my presence, Bagrovo itself was not attractive to me. I had not forgotten the sadness of our stay there in the absence of our parents ; and I had no wish to go there, especially in winter. Now my father returned ; he came hastily into the bedroom, and said, with a cheerful air that surprised me greatly, 'Thank God ! I have got everything. Anitchkoff will give us a sledge, and the Misailoffs a covered cart. So now, my dear, get ready at once. To-morrow I shall get leave of absence, and we will start the same day, using post-horses.' My mother was not pleased ; but she answered sadly, 'All my things will be ready, but your leave of absence may be a difficulty.' Our preparations

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began the same evening : clothes were packed and food was cooked for the journey ; I was allowed to take a few books with me. I told all my doubts and fears to my mother ; some of them she could not dispel, but she laughed at my fear of being frozen, and said that we should find it even hot in the sledge.

By dinner-time next day our preparations were really complete, and everything put into the sledge and the cart ; nothing kept us but my father's leave of absence. He received this at three o'clock. We had to drive some stages along the Kazan high road. Post-horses were therefore brought round, and the same evening we began our journey.

CHAPTER XI

A JOURNEY IN WINTER TO BAGROVO

Our journey lasted almost forty-eight hours, and remains in my memory as a most wearisome and unpleasant episode. As soon as we left the house to take our seats, I was horrified by the low leathern sledge with its little door which made entrance difficult. In this confined space, my sister and I, with Parasha and Annushka, had to find room. I begged to go in the cart with my mother; but the frost was terrible, and I was sternly told to get into the sledge. My mother could not travel in a shut carriage in winter, without feeling sick and faint; even in the cart she sat in a fashion peculiar to herself, quite exposed to the air on all sides. It soon got warm in the sledge, and it became necessary to undo the wrap which I wore over my *shuba* and fur-cap. We went at a gallop along the smooth track, and I had my first experience of the pleasure of quick driving. Each of the doors had a small square window which was tightly shut. I managed to creep to a window and enjoyed the view from it: the moon shone bright; stout guide-posts and sometimes trees flashed past. But, alas! my enjoyment was soon over: first a mist came over the window panes; then the frost worked patterns on them; and soon they were shrouded with a thick layer of impenetrable rime. I thought of the gloomy future before us—the dismal house at Bagrovo surrounded by snow-wreaths, and my

grandfather at the point of death. My sister had long been asleep, before kindly slumber visited me. When I woke next morning, I thought it was still early ; there was daylight in our sledge, or rather twilight, as the windows were coated more thickly than ever. The others seemed to have been awake some time, and my sister was eating something ; she crept close to me and kissed me. It was really hot in the sledge. My ear was soon caught by the loud creaking of the runners, and I felt that we were hardly moving. The reason of this I now heard : after driving two and a half stages we had turned off the highway and were now going along a cross-road, having exchanged our three post-horses harnessed abreast for horses of the district driven in single file. This increased my gloom, and my kind sister could not cheer me up. She knew my tastes, and at once asked me to read to her out of a book which lay in a wallet at the side of the sledge ; but I was so sad that I would not even read. We crawled on till we reached a Tartar village where we had to change horses ; our coachman, Stepan, had ridden on ahead to get them ready. We entered a peasant's hut which had been prepared to receive us, intending to drink tea and breakfast there. My mother looked quite ill and upset : she had had no sleep all night, and felt giddy and sick ; and her sufferings added to my distress and misery. The Tartar hut had a chimney, and a wide wooden frame to sleep on ; a heap of rather dirty feather-beds rose from the frame almost to the ceiling, covered at one end with a rug, while the rest of the frame was hidden under a white mat. My mother spread out her travelling cloak on the mat and placed her own pillows at the head of it ;

then she lay down and soon fell asleep, having told us to have our tea without her. For a whole hour she slept, while my father and sister and I, talking in whispers and careful to make no noise, drank our tea and ate some roast meat warmed up in the stove. My mother woke refreshed, and we resumed our journey. In the evening the same scene was repeated, with a difference : we stopped to change horses and got out as before, but our new shelter was not a clean Tartar hut but a regular pigsty inhabited by Mordvinians and an assortment of live stock. I think that I never in my life came across anything more disgusting than this hut, with its filth and evil smell ; to crown all, the wooden settles were so narrow that my mother, though quite worn out by the journey, could not lie down, till my father made it possible for her to do so by propping a seat against one of them. Although we were warmly shod, we sat with our legs up on a settle because there was such an appalling smell from the floor. We were told that the frost had become much harder : whenever the door opened, the cold air rushed in and filled the whole hut in a moment with clouds of what looked like white steam. We had another meal of heated-up soup and pies, and started again. As the door of our sledge had been carelessly left open, it was a long time before it was warmed up again by our presence and breath.

I cannot describe the distress and anxiety which I suffered then. I had a presentiment and a conviction that some misfortune would befall us, that we should either fall sick or be frozen like the sparrows, and jackdaws which, according to Parasha, fell dead in mid-flight. But all my

apprehensions were much more on my mother's account than on our own : our sledge had warmed up again, but she had no cover from the cold in her vehicle. My gloomy presentiments robbed me of sleep. Suddenly we stopped, and in a few minutes I became so uneasy that I awoke Parasha and implored her to knock on the door, so that some one might come and tell us the reason of the stoppage. Parasha was generally a good-tempered girl ; but she was vexed at being wakened, and said rather roughly : ' It's no good knocking now : no one will come. There are plenty of reasons for stopping.' She would certainly have had pity on me, if she had known what torture my ignorance was causing me. Thank God, the sledge soon moved on. In the morning, when we stopped again for tea, I learnt that my fears were not entirely unfounded : a Choovash, who was riding as postilion in front of the sledge, had been nearly frozen. Being thinly clad, he was so affected by the cold that he fell off his horse, unconscious. The other men rubbed him with snow and succeeded in bringing him alive to the next village. I first felt then—and I have never lost it—an intense aversion to travelling in winter over country roads, drawn by relays of country horses. Everything about it is really horrible : your harness is made of rope ; your horses are not up to the work and are poorly fed, never getting a feed of oats ; and your driver has not enough clothing to bear a stage of even ten versts in a hard frost. Our route was quite different (though I did not know it at the time) from that which we took on my last visit to Bagrovo, when there was a road over the steppe, which winter had entirely obliterated. In winter, owing to the long distance, we did not

attempt a direct line, but followed the paths which ran from one village to another.

In the morning, when I climbed out of our prison into the kindly daylight, I felt a little braver and quieter; my mother also had got accustomed to travelling and felt stronger; and the frost was less severe. The short winter day was soon over; and the darkness, which came on sooner in the sledge than elsewhere, again filled my timid heart with fears and sad forebodings. And these, unfortunately, were again realized. I say 'unfortunately,' because I have had ever since that time a rooted belief in presentiments, and throughout life have suffered more from them than from real misfortunes, although my presentiments hardly ever came true. As we got near Bagrovo that evening, our sledge drove over a stump and upset. I was asleep, and cut my forehead against the round copper head of a nail, on which a wallet was hanging; I was also nearly smothered, as Parasha and my sister and a number of pillows fell on my face, *and it was some time before the sledge could be turned on its right side.* When we were set free, I did not notice the cut on my head; my one feeling was joy that I had not been smothered. But, much to my vexation, the two maids and even my sister, who did not understand that I might have been smothered to death, laughed both at my fear and at my joy. Thank God, my mother did not know that we had been upset.

CHAPTER XII

BAGROVO IN WINTER

AT last we heard dogs barking, and pale flickering lights began to twinkle in peasants' cottages as we passed; their feeble rays found their way through the sledge windows, which were now less thickly blinded with snow. We guessed that we had reached Bagrovo; for there was no other village on our final stage of twelve versts. We stopped at the first house; and my father sent, as I afterwards heard, to inquire about grandfather; the reply was that he was still living. We drove very slowly, and our horses had bells. We were expected, and the people at Bagrovo made sure that we were in the carriage; therefore, in spite of the late hour and the cold, we were met at the front door by my grandmother and my aunt Tatyana. Both were weeping and sobbing. We went in quietly. My aunt undertook to attend to my sister and me, while my parents went to see grandfather, who was near death but quite conscious and impatient to see his son and daughter-in-law and their children. As before, the drawing-room was given up to us; for the separate room which grandfather had promised us was not furnished yet, though it was built and the roof was on. The house was quite full: all my aunts with their husbands had assembled. Mme Yerlykin and her two daughters were living in my aunt Tatyana's room; her husband and Ivan Karatayeff slept somewhere in the workshop; and the

other three aunts were put up in my grandmother's room, which was next to the sick-room. In the parlour it was bitterly cold, and not warm in the drawing-room. With some trouble a bed was found for my mother ; my sister and I slept on the sofa ; and a feather-bed was laid on the floor for my father. The samovar was brought, and we were having tea when my mother returned ; her face was quite damp from the heat and closeness of grandfather's room, which was like a Turkish bath. She felt it cold and at once set to work to raise the temperature of the room : the door into the parlour was closed and curtained over, and mats were spread over the floor. The room, which had two stoves, soon warmed up, and remained quite warm during the whole time of our stay.

Meantime my brain was in a perfect whirl of confused impressions and recollections, fears and forebodings ; and, on the top of all these, I had in reality a bad headache caused by the blow I had suffered. My mother soon noticed that I was not well and that one of my eyes was swollen ; and we were obliged to tell her of our mishap ; some fomentation was applied, and the eye bandaged. But my mother was suffering more than I from the sleeplessness, fatigue, and sickness which she had endured throughout our journey. She fell, rather than lay down, on her bed, utterly exhausted ; we also were, of course, put to bed at once. My father spent the whole night beside grandfather, whose death was expected at any moment. My mother was soon asleep ; but I lay awake for hours. Every minute I expected that grandfather would begin to die ; and, as I firmly believed that death was necessarily attended by agonizing pain

and suffering, I was constantly listening and wondering when grandfather would begin to cry out and scream. I was much troubled, too, about my mother; my head ached, and my eye was closing up; I felt feverish and on the verge of delirium, and thought I was going to be ill. But the healing power of sleep did not fail in this instance. I woke before it was light, and looked at my mother: I was glad to see that she was asleep. The pain in my head and eye had passed off; but the eye was swollen and quite closed, and the bruise had turned blue. My father's bed had not been slept in; it was clear that he had not come in at all. Then I began to look round the room: everything was just as it had been the year before; the only difference was in the window-panes, on which the hard frost had wrought its wonderful patterns. Having nothing to do, I gave full play to my fancy; more precisely, I began to compare our present condition with what was likely to befall us in future. All my notions were, of course, those of a child. I thought that, when grandfather died, grandmother, being old and grey-haired, would probably die too; in which case we should take my aunt Tatyana back to Ufa with us, and she would live in the nursery we did not use. But if grandmother did not die, we should take her too, and the house at Bagrovo would be transported to Sergéyevka and placed right on the lake; and we should spend the summer there, and fish, and my aunt would fish too. But these dreams vanished entirely at the thought of grandfather's death, which all were convinced would happen soon. I knew that he wished to see us; and I must confess that the thought of this inevitable meeting

filled me with indescribable horror. My chief fear was, that grandfather would begin to say good-bye to me and would die with his arms round me ; his arms would stiffen, so that I could not be released from their grasp ; and it would be necessary to bury me in the earth with him. Such a fear was probably due to stories I had heard of dead people and their stiffened limbs ; but it was strangely at variance with the sensible ideas I had on many subjects. The terror of this thought seemed to paralyse my heart ; my breathing stopped ; a cold sweat burst out on my forehead ; I could not lie still, but started up and sat across the sofa ; I even tried to wake my sister ; and, if I did not cry out, it was probably because I had lost the power of utterance. At this moment my mother awoke and exclaimed when she saw my face : the bandage had fallen off, and she was alarmed by the black and blue bruise over my eye. My imaginary fears vanished before my mother's real alarm : I ran to her bed, and assured her that I was perfectly well and in no pain. She was reassured, and told me that the bruise would soon disappear. Sleep had given her strength ; she got up hastily and dressed and went to grandfather's room. It was now light, and my sister awoke ; at first she was frightened by the appearance of my eye, but was comforted when a bandage was put on. She was not in the least afraid of grandfather ; but she was very sorry for him, and actually wished to go and see him. Her courage and affection for grandfather made me ashamed and gave me some courage. Soon my mother came back. She said that grandfather was sinking, but he was still conscious and wished to see us and give us his blessing. In spite

of all my efforts to control myself, I could not hide my fear, and even turned pale. My mother tried to encourage me: 'How can you be afraid of grandfather,' she said, 'when he is hardly breathing and is at the point of death?' 'That is just what I am afraid of,' I thought; but I dared not say so. She led us into grandfather's room. He was lying on his bed, with his eyes shut; his face was pale and so changed that I should not have known him. Grandmother was sitting in an arm-chair at the foot of the bed; my father was standing at the head, with his eyes swollen and red with tears. He bent down to the old man's ear and said in a loud voice, 'The children have come to say good-bye to you.' Grandfather opened his eyes; without speaking a single word, with a trembling hand he signed us with the Cross, and touched our heads with his fingers; we kissed his thin wasted hand and began to cry. At this, all the people in the room began to weep and even to sob; and I noticed for the first time that all our aunts and uncles, with grandfather's personal servants and some old women besides, were standing round us. My fear had entirely vanished, and for the moment I was full of love and pity for my dying grandfather. The room was unbearably hot and close; and my mother took us back without delay to the drawing-room, where we both cried so, that it was long before they could stop us. In order to distract our thoughts, my mother invited our cousins to join us. They were much more composed than we; they were friendly to us, and we calmed down a good deal and began talking. We talked on till dinner, which took place as usual in the parlour; there were a number of dishes, and all the party except

my mother—my father did not even appear at table—ate with appetite and talked with tolerable composure but in low tones. After dinner, our cousins joined us in the drawing-room, and I began to chatter in quite a lively style and to tell them whatever came into my head. Unconsciously, I wanted to crush down by idle talking the haunting thought of grandfather's death. From time to time my mother left us for the sick-chamber, and she allowed us to go to our cousins' room. To get there, we had to pass down a passage and through the maids' room, which was packed full of women, young and old. I noticed their dress with interest: some wore striped frocks, others were in short jackets and skirts, and others had only shifts and petticoats; all were sitting at frames and spinning flax. This was a novelty to me, and I watched the spinners with curiosity, while with one hand they pulled at the tufts of flax and with the other twirled their spindles and the thread round them. All their motions were quick and pretty; and, as *they were all silent, a peculiar sound, which was new to me, was produced by the humming of the spindles and the twitching at the tufts of flax.* I was still looking and listening attentively, when the sound of crying came from grandfather's room; I started, and in one moment the maids' room was empty. Dropping their spindles and leaving their frames, the women had all rushed in a body to where their master was lying. I believed that grandfather was dead; and the horror of the thought drove me mechanically to our cousins' room, where I climbed on my aunt's bed and hid in a corner behind the pillows. Parasha, too, leaving us alone, ran to see what was going on in

the room of the poor old master ; and this increased my fear ; but she soon came back and said that he had rallied again after the ' agony ' had apparently begun. ' All the same he will die to-night,' she added very coolly. We stayed with our cousins two hours ; but my chattering was at an end, and I sat there speechless. We were summoned to the parlour for tea ; my mother, grandmother, and aunts all came, but one at a time and not for long. My father did not come, and I was sad at not seeing him for so long , I was old enough to understand how much he suffered in watching his father die. After tea, our cousins again visited us in the drawing-room ; and again I could take no part in the conversation ; after two hours they went away to bed. How I envied them for feeling no fear, and how I wished they would not go ! In their absence my fear grew much worse. My little sister was sad about grandfather and spoke of him constantly : ' Grandfather will not eat ; they will bury him under the snow ; poor grandfather ! ' she cried ; but she was not in the least frightened and soon went to sleep. Every other feeling in me was crushed by fear, and I was sure that I would lie awake all night. I implored Parasha not to leave us, and she promised to stay till my mother came. Our night-light burned dimly, and I begged her to light a candle. I soon noticed that she was drowsy, and began to talk to her : I asked, ' Why does not grandfather cry out ? Surely it hurts him to die.' She laughed and said : ' No ; when the hour of death comes, there is no pain ; a dying man has ceased to feel anything. Your grandfather can recognize no one and cannot speak ; he wants to say something and his eyes stare, but he can only

move his lips.' At once my fancy drew a new and still more terrible picture of the dying man, which I could not banish for a moment from my sight. I felt that infinite horror which cannot be told to others, because the sufferer has lost the power of speech. Silently I clutched Parasha's hand and would not let go. The candle-wick required trimming, but I would not let go her hand for a moment: she had to take me with her and then move the candle to a table near us, so near that it was possible to trim it with the snuffers without getting up. Again she began to doze, but I woke her again and again, repeating in a piteous voice, 'Please don't go to sleep, dear Parasha!' At last my mother came; she was surprised to find me awake, and when she heard the reason, took me across to her bed and lay down, without undressing, beside me. Claspng her with both arms, and comforted by her assurances that grandfather would not die immediately, I soon went to sleep. For some hours I slept quietly, but the waking was terrible. When I opened my eyes, I saw that neither my mother nor Parasha was in the room; the candle was out, the night-light had burnt low, and the fiery tongue of its expiring wick had fallen into the tallow at the bottom of the saucer, where it threw from time to time a flicker of light round the room, and threatened every moment to leave me in utter darkness. No words can express my terror. There was a burning pain at my heart, though at the same moment my whole body seemed turned to ice. I buried my head under the counterpane and felt the cold sweat breaking out on me. In vain I shut my eyes tight—grandfather stood before me, staring at me and twitching his lips, as

Parasha had described him. The faint tapping of insects in the bare wood walls of the room pierced my ears ; I believe I should have died of fright, if there had been a sudden bang or crash at that moment. Suddenly I heard a distant sound of crying ; at first, I thought it was imagination ; but the crying soon gave place to loud shrieks of lamentation and woe. My powers of endurance were at an end : I threw off the coverlet and screamed at the top of my voice , my sister woke and began to scream too. It is probable that our screams were unheard for a long time ; for it was just then that grandfather really died, and all the household rushed to his bedside and wailed so loudly that it was impossible to hear our childish cries. I was losing consciousness and was on the verge of fainting or madness, when Parasha ran into the room. She had been sleeping soundly in the passage close by our door, till awakened by the cries of the household ; luckily, she heard my sister and me first, because we were nearer. She lit a candle at the dying night-light, took us both on her knees, and tried to quiet us. At last my mother came in, looking wretched and ill ; she told us that grandfather had died at five o'clock that morning, and that our father would come at once and lie down, as he had not slept for two nights. He did come soon, kissed us and made the sign of the Cross on us, and said, ' Your grandfather is dead ' ; then he began to weep bitterly, and we cried too. The noise of general lamentation in the house ceased. He lay down and instantly fell asleep. A candle burnt in a corner, with its light shaded in some way, and there was a glimmer of white in the windows, which made me suppose that dawn was

near. The thought gave me courage, and I soon went to sleep, in bed with my mother and sister.

I overslept myself next morning, and when I opened my eyes the bright winter sunlight was peeping in at our windows. The sound of singing as in church first struck my ears, and then I heard weeping and sobbing. The event of last night revived in my memory, and it occurred to me at once that people were praying for grandfather's soul. There was no one in the room. 'Parasha and my sister must have gone to the service,' I thought, and set myself to wait patiently till some one came; I was not afraid to be alone by day, when the sun was shining. My sister soon came in with her eyes red, and Parasha with her. 'You *have* overslept yourself,' said Parasha; 'it will soon be dinner-time'; and she began to dress me in haste. I was washing, when suddenly I heard some one chanting in a low monotonous voice, which seemed to come from the parlour. I asked Parasha what it was; she was pouring cold water over my head from the jug, as she answered, 'They are chanting the Psalms for your grandfather.' I had no idea what she meant, and was composed enough till my sister said, 'Let us go to the parlour, where grandfather is lying.' This frightened me. I was still puzzled and asked, 'But how did grandfather get into the parlour? Is he still alive?' 'Alive, bless you!' said Parasha; 'he has long been stiff and stark. His body has been washed, dressed in the *sávan*,¹ brought into the parlour, and laid on the table. There has been a service for the dead, and the priest has gone. What you heard was old

¹ i.e. shroud: the word is said to be derived from the Greek.

Yekim chanting the Psalms. Never mind what your sister says. I don't advise you to look at your grandfather; it would frighten you; one of his eyes is not closed.' Every word she spoke overcame me with fresh horror; and the last detail affected me so, that I rushed with a cry out of the door, down the passage and through the maids' room, to the room occupied by my cousins; Parasha and my sister ran after me but could not induce me to return. Fear is ridiculous, I admit; and I don't blame Parasha for laughing, as she urged me to go back and even tried to carry me off by force, while I resisted with arms and legs; but the tortures that fear applies to a child's heart are so terrible that it is a sin to laugh at them. Parasha went for my mother, who, as I learned afterwards, was busy with others attending to my grandmother, who had fainted after the service, at which she had cried herself into hysterics. My aunt Elizabeth came with my mother. I rushed into my mother's arms and begged her not to take me back to the drawing-room. She was not pleased and felt ashamed before my girl cousins that I, though a boy, was such a coward. She wished to use force; but that brought me to such a state that she was frightened herself. My aunt now took pity on me and offered to move with her daughters, who had no fear of dead people, to our room. At any other time, nothing would have induced my mother to accept such a favour; but now she agreed with eager gratitude. A stone seemed to roll off my heart when it was settled that we should move to this corner room, quite away from the parlour. In it neither the voice of the chanter nor the 'keening' of the women could be heard. This

loud wailing over the dead was regarded in those days as an essential duty. Not only my aunts, but all the older women of the household and the estate, took turns in the parlour, wailing and lamenting. 'You are our father and protector,' they cried, 'we have none left to care for us; we are miserable orphans.' Our change of room was quickly carried through; I was not present, because we were called to dinner. The meal was at a large round table in grandmother's room. After my sister and I came in, my grandmother, aunts, and cousins, all with black kerchiefs tied over their heads and some with the same round their necks, sat down side by side in silence; both my uncles were there too. The general aspect of the scene made me feel sad. They all kissed us and cried and repeated in a sing-song voice, 'Your grandfather and protector has left you,' and something else of the same kind which I forget. The table was soon covered with a number of dishes; the waiting was done—I do not know why—entirely by women. My father was busy about something in the workshop,¹ and we waited for him some time. At last my mother said to her mother-in-law, 'Why do you not sit down to dinner, mother? Alexyéi Stepanitch will be here directly.' But grandmother replied that 'Alosha² was now the rightful owner and master of the house; so it was proper to wait for him.' My mother tried to answer her: 'He is your son, and you will always be the mistress in his house.' But grandmother said, with an impatient gesture, 'No, no, daughter-in-law; that is not according to our

¹ He was probably making his father's coffin—an old Russian custom.

² Pet-name for Alexyéi.

custom. Let the cobbler stick to his last, and me to my place !' To all this I listened with great attention and curiosity. Suddenly the door opened, and my father came in. It was long since I had seen him ; I had only had a glimpse of him during the night ; he looked thin and pale and sad. Instantly all rose and went to meet him ; even grandmother, who was very stout and could not walk without some one supporting her, dragged herself towards him ; and all his four sisters fell down at his feet and began to ' keen ' It was impossible to catch all they said, and part I now forget ; but I remember the words, ' You are our father now ; be kind to us poor orphans ! ' My father with tears lifted them all up and embraced them ; when his mother advanced towards him, he bowed to the ground before her, kissed her hands, and vowed that he would always submit to her authority, and that no changes would be made by him. When this was over, they all turned to my mother, they did not bow to the ground again before her, but they called her the real mistress of the house, and begged her not to deprive them of her grace and favour. I saw that my mother heartily disliked this scene ; for she knew that these women did not love her and were willing to spite her in any way. She replied coldly, that she would never assume any authority, but would continue to show respect and affection to them all. Then they sat down to table and began to eat so heartily — my mother did not — that I watched them with astonishment. My aunt Tatyana helped fish-soup out of a large tureen, and, as she put bits of roe and liver on the plates, she begged all to do justice to them : ' How poor father loved the roe and the

liver ! ' she repeated ; and I actually saw the tears fall from her eyes into her plate. And just so the others shed tears and ate soup with wonderful relish. Dinner over, all went to lie down and sleep till tea. As I went through the maids' room to our new quarters, I glanced timidly into the passage which led straight to the parlour. From the parlour came the sound of that monotonous wearisome chanting. My parents also lay down, while my sister and I talked in whispers. My courage had returned in daylight, and I was even able to admire the bright sunbeams. I liked our new room exceedingly : for one thing, in it I was far from the dead body ; and also it was a corner room, and one side looked out on the river Boogoorooslan, which never froze, because of its rapid current and the number of springs it contained. Just opposite the windows it made a sharp bend. The view of the rapid river in the snowy landscape, the summer kitchen on an island and the high bridge leading there, the other island with its tall graceful trees covered with rime, and in the distance the mountain with its jutting cliffs—this picture had a pleasing and calming effect on me. For the first time, I felt that nature even in winter may have a beauty of its own.

My composure lasted till dark ; but with the dying rays of the setting sun, I began, without being aware of it, to lose courage. At tea-time, I was afraid to go to grandmother's room, because in the maids' room I had to pass close to the dreaded passage. My mother told me sternly to go, and I found power to obey ; but as I ran through the maids' room, I put my fingers in my ears and turned my face away from the passage. After tea

in grandmother's room, they began to talk of grandfather's death, and of the provisions of his will, and also of his funeral, which was to take place in two days. My mother, who saw that I was made uneasy by these topics, soon took my sister and me away to our corner room, and invited our cousins to come there; they sat and talked with us some time. When they left and bed-time had come, fear again mastered me and was so clearly visible on my face that my mother understood what I should suffer in the night if I were alone. My heart swelled with fervent gratitude when she said, 'Seryozha, you shall sleep with me to-night.' That was all that I could wish; and I should certainly have asked it, and it would have been granted; but how difficult and how humbling would have been the request! I could not have brought myself to it on the spot; an hour, two hours, of torment would have passed, before I came to that point. Blessings on those who have mercy on a child's timid heart, and spare him the humbling confession of his cowardice! The night passed peacefully. Awake before dawn, I overheard much interesting conversation between my parents. I learnt that my father intended to retire from his profession, and come and live at Bagrovo—very unpleasant news to me; for my experience of Bagrovo had twice proved unfortunate, and it had no attraction for me. Sergéyevka, where I had spent such a happy summer, was the object of all my hopes and plans. I also learnt another piece of news—that I should soon have a new little brother or sister.

The next day proved a repetition of its predecessor: by day I was fairly cool and courageous,

but at night-fall my fears began again. My chief anxiety was caused by the doubt whether my mother would let me sleep with her. I waited anxiously for the time when our beds would be laid; and great was my joy when I saw my own pillows placed on her bed. I heard something new: grandfather was to be buried the next day at the village of Nyeklyoodovo. This was contrary to his wishes; for he had always felt a dislike to the place. Why this was done, I do not understand to this day; but I remember that some grave reasons for it were given. I must confess my fervent wish that poor grandfather should be taken away as soon as possible; I felt that I should not enjoy true peace of mind till then. Many people throughout life have a fear of dead bodies; I had, and never saw one till I was twenty. It is hard to define this fear. Probably the grown-up man fears the effect on his own mind: he knows that the sight will disturb him and haunt his imagination. But I, at that age, had a positive fear: I was convinced that, whenever I looked at grandfather, he would come alive again for a moment and clutch hold of me!

The sad and solemn day came round. All the household rose early, and a constant running to and fro began, accompanied by the slamming of doors. Earlier than usual, we went to grandmother's room for our tea, and found her and all our aunts already dressed for going out; by the front steps stood a number of sledges, with horses harnessed in single file. The court and the road were full of people: the peasants on his own estate, old and young, were there with their wives; and people from the villages round had

come also, to say farewell to my grandfather, whom they all respected and loved like a father. When all was ready, there was a general move to look for the last time on the dead. Then the 'keening' cry rose in the parlour and filled all the house with noise. I was much moved, but I felt no fear now—only a dim conception of the importance of what was going on. pity for poor grandfather, and sorrow that I should never see him more. Every door in the house was opened wide, and the cold was terrible. My mother told Parasha not to take my sister, who was crying in her eagerness to go, through the cold to say farewell to grandfather. So we three were left alone in grandmother's warm room. Suddenly, there was a dull sound in the parlour, and the tread of many feet; and the sound of weeping and 'keening' kept pace with the feet past our door. Soon after, I saw a wooden coffin going down the front steps; it seemed to be supported on men's heads. Then the dense crowd parted; and I could see that the coffin was carried by my father and two uncles and an old man who himself was supported by others. My grandmother, too, was led along at first, but soon put into a sledge, while my aunts and my mother walked behind. Many of those who were standing in the court bowed to the ground. The crowd moved slowly forwards into the road, stretched out all along it, and at last disappeared from my sight. Standing on a chair and looking out of the window, I wept and wept, filled with a real feeling of love and tenderness for my grandfather, whom all loved so warmly. For one moment, I even wished to see him once more and kiss his thin wasted hand.

We sat in sad silence in grandmother's room. The noise and movement in the house had given place to a deathly stillness. But suddenly a sledge drove up to the steps; and my mother and our two cousins got out. I believed that every one had gone to Nyeklyoodovo, twenty versts away; and I cried out for joy to see them. They were soon followed by crowds of peasants returning from the procession. My mother had followed the body to the end of the village, where the coffin was laid on a sledge, and all who were going on to the grave took their places in other sledges. We went back to our corner room. My mother, very weary and very sad for the death of one whom she loved dearly, remained almost all day lying down, and left us to ourselves. Our cousins spent the day with us, and we had much friendly talk. It is true, they did most of the talking, and from them I learnt much that was new to me and even much that I had thought impossible. For instance, I discovered that they had little love for their parents: they feared them, and constantly told lies to deceive them. I tried to reprove them for this conduct; I wished to show that they were wrong and to teach them how good children ought to behave. For this purpose, I drew upon my reading and still more upon my own experience; but my cousins did not understand me, or laughed at me, or declared that their papa and mamma were quite unlike mine.

Late in the evening my father returned. My grandmother was staying the night at Nyeklyoodovo with some nieces; and so were my aunts; but my father had come straight home from the graveside, declining all invitations even to enter

their house. He had eaten nothing all day and was terribly tired, as he had walked a long way behind grandfather's coffin. I slept that night in the same crib as my sister. Fear came on me again in the evening, but I concealed it. My mother would have let me sleep with her, but it interfered with her rest, and also she was asleep before I went to bed. For long I lay awake: a coffin swaying up and down, with something lying inside it, and slowly moving forwards on the shoulders of a crowd of people—this picture would not leave me and banished sleep to a distance. At last, after many efforts, thank God! I fell asleep and slept till late.

Grandmother, with my aunts and uncles, came back in time for dinner next day. The whole house was scoured the day before, and the stoves were kept hot, so that it was warm everywhere except in the parlour, from which every one was excluded for nine days. The chanting of the Psalms went on day and night in the room where grandfather lived and in which he died. All our meals were eaten in grandmother's room, which was the largest in the house after the parlour; and it was used generally as a sitting-room also. For some days, my mother was not herself again: she preferred to sit with us in our sunny corner room; it was colder than the rest of the house, but my mother chose to remain there till our departure for Ufa, which was to take place in nine days' time.

Young as I was, I noticed that all my aunts, and especially the unmarried one, often kissed and embraced my father, and said that he was now their only protector and guardian. To my mother, too, they

were very demonstrative. My aunt Tatyana often came to our room, 'that her dear sister-in-law might not find it lonesome,' and invited her to discuss different household matters. But my mother always replied, 'that she had no intention of interfering with their family and domestic concerns, that her consent was not needed, and that all depended on mother,' meaning her mother-in-law. My father attended certain family councils, and then reported to my mother that his late father had given verbal instructions to grandmother before our arrival, to this effect: each daughter (except Aksinya, my good-natured godmother) was to have one family of serfs belonging to the house; and for Tatyana, land was to be bought from the Bashkirs, and twenty-five peasants, whose names were specified, were to be transferred to settle there; also, he left among his daughters a quantity of grain and personal property of all kinds. 'All my father said to me was this: "Be kind to Tanyusha,¹ and let her have the same that I gave to her sisters on their marriage"; but I regard his instructions to my mother as sacred, and shall carry them out.' My mother gave her approval to this resolve. When my father signified his full intention to carry out grandfather's wishes, all thanked him with low bows, and Tatyana bowed right down to the ground. She came, too, on purpose to embrace my mother and thank her; but my mother declined all thanks, saying that she had nothing to do with these arrangements.

From time to time, I noticed Parasha whispering to my mother, who sometimes listened but usually sent her about her business. But this same

¹ Diminutive form of Tatyana.

Parasha, when she was dressing me one day, said, 'There you sit and do nothing, and they're robbing you all the time.' Not understanding this, I asked her to explain. 'Just see,' she said, 'how many peasants, and serfs, and gear of all kinds your father has given away among his sisters. And why? Your grandfather never said they were to have it. They asked him, sure enough; but he replied, "Be content with what your brother Alosha gives you." Tanaichónok heard all this with his own ears, and everybody in the house knows it.' The whole matter was rather puzzling to me, and her words left no impression on my mind; but, following my regular custom, I told my mother about it. She was so angry with Parasha, that I was frightened to hear her speak so loud and so fiercely. Parasha cried and begged to be forgiven; she fell at my mother's feet, crossed herself, and took God to witness that it should never happen again. 'The first time anything of the kind does happen,' said my mother, 'I shall pack you off to Old Bagrovo, to herd cattle.' How sorry I was for poor Parasha! How piteously she looked at me and implored me to intercede for her! I did so with eagerness, and felt guilty for having brought such woe upon her. My mother forgave her, but nevertheless banished from our room a girl whom she liked and had owned since her marriage: Parasha was never to appear, unless she was summoned; and I was strictly forbidden to pay heed to the talk of servants. The whole story, I was told, was made up by the servants in the house. At the time, of course, it never entered my head to doubt my mother's account of the matter; I was much

older before I understood my mother's anger with Parasha, and her wish that I should remain ignorant of the sad truth which she herself knew too well. Then I understood also why my mother blamed the innocent servants at Bagrovo, and I realized that on this occasion the servants had behaved better than some of their superiors.

My grandmother and aunt were now so kind to my sister and me, that I was convinced we were general favourites, and soon opened out to all and especially to grandmother. Before long, I proposed that all the party should hear me recite from the *Rossiad* and the tragedies of Sumarokoff. I was listened to with attention; and my audience praised me and said that I was a clever boy and a good scholar.

In a few days my fears vanished entirely. I went all about the house, sometimes accompanied by Yevséitch. Once, when he was not with me, I even peeped into grandfather's room. It was empty: everything had been removed except his wooden settle and bedstead with cord sacking, which still stood in one corner; in the centre of the bed was a narrow board covered with felt, and on this the chanter who was off duty slept. There were two of them, Yekim Miséitch, who was old and decrepit, and Vassili, who was quite young and had red hair. The chanting went on day and night, and they took turns at it. The first time I entered this dismal room, Miséitch was chanting in a slow nasal voice; even with spectacles he found it difficult to make out the print of the Psalter. A high stand in one corner was covered with a white cloth and supported a large ikon with a yellow wax candle burning.

before it. At times Miséitch crossed himself, and at times he bowed. For some time I stood still, feeling moved and sorrowful. Suddenly, I felt a wish to chant the Psalms myself for grandfather, I had learnt at Ufa to read the service-books. I asked Miséitch if I might, and he agreed. First, he made me say a prayer; then I stood up on grandfather's low settle which was placed for me, and began to chant. At first, excitement seemed to choke me. I could hear my heart beat, and my clear childish voice shook; but I soon got over this and felt an indescribable satisfaction. I had gone on for some time, when I was interrupted by the voice of Yevséitch, who had come in behind me and stood listening. 'I think that's enough, my little falcon,' said he; 'but you're a fine reader.' I looked round: Miséitch was leaning against the window, asleep. When we awakened him, he thanked me and went on with his chanting. I said a prayer before the ikon, looked at red-haired Vassili sleeping on grandfather's bed, thought of all that was past, and sadly left the room.

And now the ninth day came, and with it the commemoration-service for grandfather. The evening before, the whole party, including my two cousins, drove to Nyeklyoodovo to spend the night. Only my parents were left; and they started early on the ninth day, to be in time for the Mass. My sister and I were alone in the house; but Yevséitch would not part with me, and I proposed to go again to grandfather's room and chant the Psalms. We found Miséitch reading and red-haired Vassili sleeping, as before. At starting, I felt some emotion, but my voice was steady

now, and my secret satisfaction was even greater than the first time. Yevséitch listened long and patiently; at last he said: 'I think that's enough, my little falcon, I'm sure your little legs are tired.' Once more Miséitch was asleep, leaning against the window; once more I said a prayer, and prostrated myself on the ground, once more I looked sadly at grandfather's bed—and we left the room. That was my last sight of the room in that condition. As we went out, Yevséitch said to me: 'That was just right, my little falcon: while the rest were praying over your grandpapa's grave at Nyeklyoodovo, you were reading the Psalms for him in his own room.' I had a feeling of extreme satisfaction mixed with a kind of pride.

The whole party returned from Nyeklyoodovo for dinner, about which my aunts had been busy before they left, as I noticed; they brought with them my grandmother's nieces with their elder children. Before their arrival, dinner was laid on the large table in the parlour. My mother was very tired and upset, and my father's eyes were red with tears; but all the rest seemed to me fairly cheerful. The moment they arrived, they sat down to dinner. There were many dishes, and all so rich that my mother hardly allowed us to eat anything. At the end of dinner, piles of pancakes made their appearance; and the diners, who had been cheerful and talked loudly up till then, ate them with tears and even sobs. My mother ate nothing and was very sad; I never took my eyes off her. When she came to our room after dinner, I heard her say to Parasha, who had now been taken back into favour: 'I could eat

nothing, sitting at the very table on which his body was laid.' I was so impressed by these words, that I myself felt a disgust for what I had eaten ; I actually turned sick. In the evening the visitors left, because there was no room for them in the house.

Next day, we made our preparations and packed ; and early on the third day we started. Our good-byes took a long time : many tears were shed, and there was much kissing and embracing. Grandmother said more than once : ' For God's sake, Alosha, be quick and resign your post, and come to live in the country. How can I manage men's business ? I am a widow and an old woman. I am no use, and Tanyusha is young ; and we don't understand things. Your late father kept everything together ; but now no one will obey Tanyusha and me. We shall be left alone, now that everybody is going away. We are only women, and how can we get on ? ' My father promised to comply with her wishes.

CHAPTER XIII

UFA

I MUST confess that I was not sorry to leave Bagrovo. Twice over I had stayed there, and each time I had been unhappy. The first time was in a rainy autumn; and the separation from my parents and the unmistakable indifference of our relations (though I should except my grandfather) had been hard to bear. The second time I went, it was a cruel winter, and grandfather died, and I was tortured by fear in a way which I did not soon forget. Thus I had no reason to love Bagrovo. Our journey back to Ufa was much shorter and pleasanter: the frost was less severe, the sledge windows were not entirely veiled by snow, and the sledge itself did not upset.

At Ufa all our friends were very glad to see us again. The circle of our acquaintance, and especially of the children we knew, had grown much smaller: my godfather, M. Myortvavo, who, though he never made much of me, never teased me, had left some time before for Petersburg; the Knyazhevitches and their children had settled in Kazan; and the Mansuroffs also, with all their family, had gone to live somewhere else.

I had gained many new ideas and feelings, and I set to work to read my books over again. I understood much of their contents better than before, and even found there much that had entirely escaped me; hence the books themselves seemed to me in a sense new. More than a year had gone

by since my unsuccessful attempt to teach my sister to read; my want of success was a real distress to me, and I started again on this important task; but my pains were still unrewarded. My sister could learn three or four of her letters in a morning and keep them in her memory till evening, for I always examined her at bedtime; but next morning her mind was an absolute blank. I could now write copies quite well; arithmetic I had long given up. I had hopes that we should go again to Sergéyevka in spring; but my mother told me this was not to be; for, in the first place, she was in good health, thank God; and, in the second, she would perhaps give me a new little sister or brother at the end of May. I was much interested and pleased by this prospect, but I parted with sorrow from my hope of spending the summer at Sergéyevka. My love of nature was growing strong; my love of fishing was also a powerful motive; and the approach of spring worked powerfully on a boy who was easily carried away and was later to be a passionate fisherman.

As soon as we returned to Ufa, I began to notice that discussions, and even heated discussions, were going on between my parents. The fact was, that my father wished to carry out exactly the promise he had given to his mother—to resign his post at once and move to the country, so as to save her from all the cares of management and assure the peace of her old age. He thought it essential for him to move to the country and manage the estate, even in case my grandmother would have agreed to live with us in the town—a plan which she would not hear of. ‘Without

the master's eye,' he said, 'everything will get out of order, and in a few years both Old and New Bagrovo will be changed beyond recognition.' My father spoke much and long to this effect, always keeping his temper; but my mother replied with warmth to all his good reasons, that she disliked life in the country and especially at Bagrovo, where she was never well; that she was not liked by his relations; and that she would meet with constant annoyances there. There was another strong reason for moving to the country, in the shape of a letter from Praskovya Ivanovna Kurolyessova. When she heard of the death of my grandfather, whom she always called her second father and chief benefactor, she wrote to my father thus:

'It is absurd for you to go on living in a small way at Ufa, employed in some court or other and earning a pittance of 300 roubles. It will be far better for you to take up the management of your own estates; and you can lend a hand as well to an old woman like me in managing mine. You can easily do so; for Old Bagrovo is only fifty versts from Choorassovo, where I live all the year round.'

At the end of the letter she said that she ought long ago to have made the acquaintance of my mother, and hoped to see her now, and also the children who were to be her heirs. This letter my father read several times to my mother, and pointed out that it was impossible to refuse, unless they wished to displease his aunt and put an end to his expectations. To this my mother had no reply to make. I had settled before this in my own mind that Praskovya Ivanovna was a masterful

personage who expected to be obeyed, somewhat like the late Empress; and now this notion was confirmed. The disputes, however, went on, and my father would not give way: one concession only my mother was able to secure—that he would not resign his post at once, but would postpone this step till she had recovered from her approaching illness, i. e. till summer. This approaching illness, it was explained to me, was connected with the coming of the expected brother or sister. After more than one rough draft, a letter was written to Praskovya Ivanovna; and I too was made to write, on ruled paper, and say that I loved my grand-aunt and wished to see her. I did not really wish to see her, and I could not love her, because I did not know her. I knew that I was writing what was untrue, and untruthfulness was always severely judged in our house; so I frankly asked why I was made to write what was not true. My mother replied that I would certainly love this lady when I knew her, and that I ought to love her now, because she loved us and meant to be very kind to us; my further questions and expostulations were not listened to.

Rumours of different kinds came constantly to the town from Petersburg, and caused general dismay and alarm. Exactly what they were, I could never find out, because they were never spoken of openly, and the regular answer to my questions was, that I was still a child and had no business to know about such matters. I felt hurt; and one answer in particular enraged me: 'People who know too much soon grow old.' But one fact could not be concealed. The Tsar ordered that all who were in the public service should

wear coats of a peculiar cut, with buttons bearing the imperial arms—such a coat was called an ‘Ober-rock’—and all their wives had to wear on public occasions a kind of jacket over their dresses, the jacket being embroidered in the same way as the men’s uniform. My mother was very skilful at dressmaking of every kind; and she set to work at once to make silver braiding which looked very pretty on the light blue collar of a white spencer or jacket. She wore this costume several times, when going to church on festivals, or when calling on the Governor’s wife, and perhaps elsewhere. I always admired her in it, and often went with her to the door. Every one called her a beauty; and she was really more beautiful than any one whom I knew.

Spring came on and brought with it sorrow rather than joy to me. What did I care, if the torrents began to pour down from the hills, if bare patches of earth were showing in the garden and near the church, and if the river melted once more, and once more spread far and wide over the fields? I was not to see Sergéyevka with its splendid lake and towering oaks; I was not to sit with Yevséitch on the jetty and fish, nor to watch Soorka as he lay on the bank and basked in the sun. Then I heard unexpectedly that my father was going to Sergéyevka; I fancy this was settled some time before but concealed from me, to spare me useless distress. Our land was to be surveyed, and a surveyor was to go there for the purpose. The survey was to be completed in a fortnight, as my father was bound to return before the arrival of my new brother or sister. I dared not ask to go with him. The roads were still

impassable, and the river Byélaya in full flood: my father had to take a boat for the first ten versts, and then make his way, as best he could, to Sergéyevka on a peasant's cart. My mother was very uneasy about him, and her uneasiness spread to me. She also feared that he would be detained by the survey; and to reassure her, he gave her his word, that if it were not over in a fortnight, he would drop everything and come back to us, leaving some one, perhaps Theodore, Parasha's husband, to represent him on the spot. At the parting, my mother could not refrain from tears, and I simply howled. I was sorry to part with him and afraid for him; and it was a bitter thought, that I was not to see Sergéyevka or fish in the lake. Yevséitch tried in vain to console me: he said that walking was impossible in the mud, and fishing, in the flooded state of the lake; but I felt some doubts, having noticed more than once that in order to set my mind at rest, people told me what was not true. That fortnight was long in passing. Though during our life in town I was not much with my father, as he generally went to his office in the morning and either dined out or had friends to dinner in the evening, yet I felt listless and sad in his absence. He had not time to explain properly to me what was meant by a 'survey'; so, to supplement my knowledge, I questioned my mother and Yevséitch on the point; and when I learnt nothing new from them—they were quite ignorant themselves—I invented an explanation of my own for what seemed to me a solemn and important business. What the process looked like, I found out: I became familiar with the posts, stakes, and chain,

and the witnesses in attendance. My fancy drew many pictures of it, in which I wandered in thought with my father over the fields and woods of Sergéyevka. It is odd that my imaginary notions of surveying were a very fair approximation to the reality; I learnt this later by experience, and my early belief in the solemnity and importance of surveying always came back to me, as I rode or walked behind the theodolite, which struck awe into the peasant who carried it, while others dragged the chain and drove in stakes at every twenty yards. Of the real object, i. e. to measure the land and make a plan of it, I had, of course, no idea then; and my ignorance was not confined to myself.

My father kept his word: he returned to Ufa in a fortnight to the day. The return journey was much more difficult: the floods had begun to abate rapidly, leaving bare earth in many places, so that he had to ride over the ten versts which he had crossed in comfort in a boat a fortnight earlier. In the valleys and hollows there was still plenty of standing water, which sometimes came up to the horse's belly. When he arrived, he was splashed with mud from head to foot. We were all delighted to see him; but he was not in good spirits. Many Bashkirs, and all the Russian squatters, i. e. the inhabitants of the two old villages, had disputed his claim; and black posts had been erected round the land. (Black posts were used to indicate disputed land; owners with an uncontested title might put up white posts.) When he had told all his adventures, my father added: 'Well, Seryozha, it will be a long story before Sergéyevka is really yours;

I am sorry now we were in such a hurry to transfer peasants there.' I was vexed, because the feeling of property was very pleasant to me; and from that time I ceased to speak complacently, on every convenient occasion, of my *Sergéyevka*.

When the end of May approached, my sister and I were moved from the nursery to what we called the dining-room, though we never dined there. Parasha slept with us, and Yevséitch in the room between us and the workshop; he had orders from my mother to be with me always. To be separated thus from my mother by the full length of our large house, seemed to me quite unnecessary, in spite of many assurances that it was required by my mother's health, and that the life of the coming brother or sister depended upon it. It was not till later that I learnt the real cause of this separation.

It was at this time—on the first of June, I believe—that a violent thunderstorm took place and produced on me a strong impression of fear. It began about ten in the evening, when we were going to bed in the large room which had been the dining-room. Immediately opposite our windows the summer sun had gone down; and though the western sky was still clear and threw a rosy light over the room, a black cloud was coming up, and from time to time discharged a dull rumble of thunder. I was standing beside my bed, saying my prayers, when suddenly there came a terrific crash of thunder which shook the whole house and deafened us. I threw myself on my bed and got a severe blow on my leg. For a few moments I did not realize where I was; then I found myself sitting on Yevséitch's knee,

while the rain poured as if from a bucket and the room was lit up by the glare from a fire. Yevséitch explained that the cathedral belfry had been set on fire by the lightning: that was where the glare came from. My sister also had been frightened and was in her nurse's arms. Suddenly the Kalmuck 'Princess' came in with a message that the mistress wanted the children. We were taken to the bedroom, where my mother was lying in bed; my father was attending to her, together with a certain Alyóna Maksímovna, whom everybody in the house called 'the midwife'. I noticed that my mother was ill as well as agitated; she made us sit on her bed, and then kissed and caressed us; and I thought that she was crying. When she saw my uneasiness, which my sister was beginning to share, she said that the thunder and the thought of our fright had alarmed her; but she would be quite well to-morrow. She gave us her blessing and sent us off to bed. My father too gave us his blessing; and I noticed that he had all his clothes on, and was not preparing to go to bed; from which I guessed that my mother was ill. We went back to our own room. As the night was warm, the windows were opened; the deluge was over, and a light rain was falling. Looking out of the window, we could see three fires, which gave a tolerable light in spite of the black clouds. An officer rode up to our window, and asked a question about my mother's health. My sister soon grew sleepy, and Parasha put her to bed and then went to sleep herself. I sat up for a long time with Yevséitch, talking and looking out of the window. My fear had passed off, and I began to ask him what lightning was, and why

it burns, and what caused the noise of thunder. His reply was: 'The lightning is the fiery arrow of the thunder; and whatever it strikes catches fire.' The sky became clear, the stars began to twinkle, and the morning light was beginning to shine when at last I fell asleep in my crib.

Next day my suspicion was confirmed: my mother was really ill, and there was no further attempt to conceal this from us. Our old friend, Avenarius, came to the house, and some other doctor as well. My sister and I saw our mother for a moment only; she kissed us and sent us away, saying that she wished to sleep. The green window curtains were drawn and the room almost dark, so that I could not see her face clearly. My father looked pale and anxious. Grief oppressed my heart; I could not occupy myself in any way; I could only cry, and beg to go to my mother. My father must have been told of this; for he came to our room, and said that if I wished mother to get well soon, I must stop crying and asking to go to her; I should pray to God and ask Him to be merciful to her; though my mother could not see me, yet her mother's heart knew of my tears, and this made her worse. I believed him; and when I had prayed to God, I could keep back the tears, though I was not comforted. I tried to console my sister, who was sad too and cried more than once.

Next day, my mother was clearly worse; for we were not allowed to go to her, even to say good-morning. The doctors came again and again to the house. The great ikon of Our Lady of Iberia was brought from the church, and a service was held in my mother's room. We were not allowed

to attend it; but we saw the great ikon borne through the parlour and heard the chanting; and we knelt in prayer at the open door of our room. We were not even allowed into the garden that day, but were kept to the court-yard—a large place and covered with grass like a meadow. We were told to run about, but we only walked quietly up and down. Soorka's advances met with no response from me, when he sprang up to my face, stood up on me, and licked my hands. Yevséitch and Parasha were sad and silent, or spoke to one another in whispers. Yevséitch had given up the attempt to cheer or comfort me: he only repeated, when he saw the tears constantly welling to my eyes, 'Pray to God that your mamma may recover, my little falcon.' When we returned from our sorrowful walk, I threw myself on my bed, drew the curtains close, hid my head under the pillow, and gave vent to the tears which I had repressed so long with an effort extraordinary for a child. This thought was in my mind too—that I was hidden and making no noise, so that my mother could not see or hear my grief. Yevséitch must have realized that it was impossible to stop such weeping as mine: he stood a long time near my crib and said nothing, though he knew that I was crying. At last I could weep no more, and fell asleep. I slept fairly long and woke with a cry, as if in fear. My sister came running to me and said in a happy voice, 'Mamma is better'; and Parasha said the same. Yevséitch was not there, but he soon came, and Parasha met him with the question, 'Well, the mistress is better, is she not?' 'She is,' he answered, but his voice shook. I noticed his voice, but still took

some comfort. Our dinner-time was long past; my sister had refused to eat in my absence, but now she was quite ready to sit down at table with me, and we took our dinner somehow. I asked Yevséitch to inquire about my mother; he went, came back immediately, and said, 'The mistress is asleep'; a little later Parasha went and brought back the same report. A doubt began to creep into my heart; I looked attentively at them both and said firmly, 'What you are saying is not true.' They did not reply at once, but glanced at one another and looked disconcerted. Noticing this, I refused to listen to any further reassuring statements. While we were disputing over this, my father came in, and I guessed all from his face. 'Come with me,' he said in a low voice; 'your mother wishes to see you and give you her blessing.' I burst into sobs, and my sister followed my example. 'Now listen,' he said; 'if your mother sees you crying, she will get worse; she may even die of it; if you don't cry, it will do her good.' The tears dried up in my eyes; and my sister also stopped crying. After waiting a little, my father took our hands and led us to the bedroom. The room was so dark that I could only distinguish my mother's form but not her face. We went close to the bed and knelt down; my mother blessed us with the ikon, made the sign of the Cross over us, and kissed us; then she made a hasty gesture, and we were removed at once. In the drawing-room we met a priest; he blessed us too, and we went back to our room in a sort of stupefied state. I had lost the power to think and even to understand: two things went round and round in my

head—the darkened room and my mother's burning face. My state of mind could not be called cold despair: the thought of my mother's death never entered my head; but I believe that my ideas had become confused, and that this was the beginning of some kind of insanity. When bedtime came, Yevséitch undressed me and told me to say my prayer; I did so, and at the end said aloud as usual, 'God bless papa and mamma.' When I lay down, Yevséitch took a chair near me and began to talk, but I did not listen. I don't remember that I slept, but Yevséitch declared afterwards that I went to sleep and slept about an hour. I only remember that suddenly I heard joyful voices saying, 'Glory to God! Glory to God! God has given you a little brother; now your mamma will soon be well.' It was Yevséitch and Parasha, speaking to my sister; and she, with a joyful shout, ran to my bed, pulled aside the curtains, climbed up, and threw her little arms round me. All came back to me at once; I burst out sobbing wildly, and sobbed so long that I damped the general joy and made them all uneasy. My father was fetched. When he came and heard my sobs, he went up to me and called out, 'What are you doing, Seryozha? You ought to rejoice, not to cry. Glory to God, you have got a little brother, and mother will soon get well.' He took me up and placed me on his knee, and kissed and embraced me. It was long ere my convulsive sobs were quieted and I ceased to tremble and shake. But by degrees calm was restored; and the first thing I saw was, that the room was bright with the morning light; and next I understood that my mother was alive and

would get well! My heart was full of an inexpressible happiness.

It was on the fourth of June that this happened; and it must have been very early, as the sun had not risen. I kept asking why my sister had wakened, and why she had heard the good news before me. She declared that she was not asleep when Parasha came running in; but I was unwilling to believe her. I also insisted for a long time that I had not been asleep; but at last I was obliged to admit that I was really asleep when I was awakened by the loud voices of Parasha and Yevséitch and my sister's shout of joy. My father soon went away, and the two servants made haste to put us to bed. We did not go to sleep at once, but lay in our cribs, discussing what our little brother was like. At last we were forbidden to talk, and sweet sleep came over us.

At a late hour we woke to happiness, and I asked at once to see my mother. I asked so persistently that Yevséitch went to tell my father; but my father sent me a message that I must not think of it, and that I could not see her for some days. This grieved me. Then I asked to see the baby, and Parasha went down and got leave from Alyona Maksimovna for us to go quietly through the maids' room to our brother's nursery, which was divided from my mother's bedroom by another nursery which was generally occupied by my sister and me. Even outside the door we walked on tiptoe, which made Parasha laugh. In the little nursery a pretty cradle was hanging from a copper ring fixed in the ceiling. It had been a present from my maternal grandfather when my eldest sister, who soon died, was

born; in it I and my second sister had been rocked. A chair was placed for me to climb on. I pulled aside the green silk canopy and saw an infant in swaddling clothes sleeping there; all I noticed was, that he had some black hair on his little head. My sister was held up, and gazed in her turn at the sleeping brother; and we both approved of him. A foster-mother had been procured already, and was in the room, wearing her dress of office; she kissed our hands. She had not yet taken the baby; syrup of rhubarb was all he got at present. Alyona Maksimovna, seeing what good children we were, walking on tiptoe and talking in whispers, promised we should come every day to see the baby when she was going to wash him. Delighted by this prospect, we went cheerfully to play, first in the court and then in the garden. Now I accepted with goodwill the advances of my favourite, Soorka; and I believe that I ran and jumped and rolled on the ground more than he did. In the garden, I asked at once why we had been kept out of it the day before. Parasha was often hasty, and she answered without thinking, 'Oh, because your mother was crying out so yesterday, and in the garden you would have heard her.' This news caused me such agitation and distress, that Parasha did not know how to put things to rights. She declared most solemnly that it was all over now, that she had seen her mistress with her own eyes and spoken to her, and that she was not ill, only weak. She begged me to conceal her slip of the tongue from Yevséitch and every one else, declaring that she would be severely scolded for it; and I promised to tell no one. I believed what Parasha said,

and was relieved, and my heart grew light once more.

My happiness remained unclouded till the evening Parasha's last words had made me understand more clearly the terrible nature of what had happened the day before, but still I had no doubt that all was well over, and that my mother was nearly well. But in the evening, when the doctors came again and again, when the maids were constantly running from their room to the kitchen and hall, and above all, when I saw my father's sad face, on his coming to say good night to us at bedtime—doubt and disquietude came upon me. In reply to my questions, my father had not courage to say that mother was well: he only said, 'She is better; God is merciful, and she will get well.' And God was in truth merciful to us; for, after a few days, which I passed in anxiety and grief, I was relieved by the returning cheerfulness on my father's face, and by the assurances of Avenarius that my mother was really getting better and I should see her quite well in a few days. Then, and not till then, I turned all my attention and interest and love on the new little brother. We went every day to see him in his bath; but at first I looked on without interest; for in thought I was living in my mother's room, beside her bed of suffering.

At last, after an interval of nearly a week, I did see my mother. She was pale and thin and still confined to bed; the green curtains were drawn, and perhaps that was why her face seemed to me paler than ever. My father had instructed me beforehand: not only was I not to cry, but I was not to show too much joy, nor to be too demon-

strative. This perplexed me ; for I did not then know how to hide warm feelings and moderate the expression of them. I must have seemed strange and unlike myself ; for my mother said, ' Seryozha, you're not a bit glad that your mother did not die ! ' I broke down, and ran from the room. My father then explained the reason of my trouble. When I had had my cry out, I was called back to the room, and my mother tenderly embraced us both (but me especially), and said, ' Don't be afraid ; your love will not hurt me.' I put my arms round her and cried on her breast : ' If you had died,' I whispered, ' I should have died too.' But my mother evidently felt that this interview was too exciting for her ; for she said suddenly and hastily : ' Go and see your little brother ; he is soon to be christened.' We went straight to the nursery. The infant had just been washed, dressed in a fine new frock, and wrapped up in a new sheet and a pink velvet coverlet ; he was, as may be supposed, crying. I felt sorry for him ; but he soon grew quiet at the breast of his foster-mother. Seeing the preparations for the christening, and hearing it talked of, I asked an explanation of a ceremony which I had never heard of and never seen. When the explanation was given, I was determined to act as godfather to my brother. I was told that this was impossible : I was too young, and I had no godmother to stand at the font with me. But I easily got over the second difficulty, by saying that my sister would act as godmother. As I was obstinate, and likely to cry if disappointed, a trick was played upon me, which took me in at the time : my sister and I were placed beside the real godfather and godmother at

the ceremony. The symbolical mysteries of the rite I could not understand ; but I watched with strained attention, surprise, and even alarm : I thought that the priest might cut my brother's head with the scissors ;¹ and when the infant was dipped in the water, I cried out with fear. By my importunity I won the privilege of holding my godson at the font—the nurse, as a matter of course, was holding him also—and I long retained the pleasing delusion that my brother was my godson ; I went so far as to sign him with the Cross whenever we parted.

Within a few days, we were moved back from the dining-room to our old nursery. My mother's convalescence was slow : she hardly attended at all to household duties, and saw no one except the doctor, the Chichagoffs, and Mme Cheprunoff. I was constantly with her and read various books to her aloud, some to amuse her, others to send her to sleep . for some reason, she slept but little at night. Amusing books were got from the library of M. Amtebkoff ; for the other object, we used my books for children, and also the *Rossiad* and Sumarokoff. Among the former sort, I remember in particular *The Life of the English Philosopher, Cleveland*,² in fifteen volumes, I think, which I read with great satisfaction. Apart from reading, I very soon became accustomed to wait on my mother, and to give her her medicines at the regular hours with strict punctuality ; she did not often want her maid, and when she did, I summoned her. This was a satisfaction to my mother, because she

¹ A scrap of hair is cut by the priest at baptism.

² A novel by l'Abbé Prevost, author of *Manon Lescaut* : the original in five volumes was published 1732-4.

will be living within thirty versts of us. At least it will be possible to breathe freely in their society two or three times a year.' I did not quite understand all this, but I believed my mother and shared her sad forebodings. She also disapproved of the proposed visit to Praskovya Ivanovna for a prolonged stay at Choorassovo; she did not yet know that lady and supposed her to be like my father's other relations. In fact, she turned out quite different. My dear little sister was very grieved to leave Ufa; but I don't to this day know why she was.

As soon as my mother began to get better, my father sent in an application, asking leave to resign his post. At the same time, my two uncles came to us from their regiment; both had retired from the army, the elder with the rank of major, the younger as a captain. This difference of rank caused general surprise: for both were enrolled in the Guards on the same day, transferred as captains to a line regiment on the same day, and retired from the army on the same day. I was very glad to see them, especially my uncle Serghéi, whom I considered such a wonderful artist. I reminded him how he used to tease me 'when I was small', and added, with a feeling of my own importance, that it was no longer possible to play foolish jests on me. As a parting gift, my uncle painted me an incomparable picture on glass; it represented a marsh, a young sportsman with a gun, and a white setter with liver-coloured spots and close-cropped tail; the dog had just found some game and was pointing at it, with one leg in the air. The picture was prophetic; for I became a keen shot later. My uncle was very fond of the

in the work, Alexyéi Stepanitch. I don't like to see a field like this. it's all thistles and weeds. You walk and walk all day, and glean an ear now and again.' My father answered, 'We can't help it; it is God's will'; and the surly reaper replied with no trace of surliness in his voice, 'We all know that, *batyushka*.'

It was some time before I understood the profound significance of these simple words; they calm all agitation and check all human murmurings, and under their beneficent power Orthodox Russia lives to this day. Clear and calm is the heart of that man who can say them and hear them with conviction.

Most of the inhabitants of Parashino were in low spirits; and the chief cause of this was a severe epidemic among their cattle, on the top of the bad harvest. My father spoke long on the subject with Mironitch, who said, for one thing:

'If God has sent us a poor harvest, that does not matter so much; we've plenty of last year's corn in the village; and if any one runs short, what else is the owner's granary there for? But it does matter to a peasant with a family of small children, when God sends plague among the cattle. How can the children do well without milk, *batyushka* Alexyéi Stepanitch? Now there's the foreman, Archipoff, he had eight milch cows in his byre and not one hair of them is left; and he has a lot of children. God is angry at our sins.'

Parashino was a rich village, but it suffered often from cattle-plague. My father knew the real cause of this, and he said to Mironitch:

'You must look more strictly after the men who deal in leather. They buy for a song from the

'Bashkirs the hides of cattle that have died of plague; and that accounts for the constant epidemics at Parashino.'

Mironitch scratched his head and looked displeased as he answered, 'You may be right, *batyushka*; but in any case it is for our sins that God sends His punishments.' My father did not forget to ask for the old man whom he had seen working in the mill. He was now excused from all kinds of work, and died within the year. The old peasants from Bagrovo said this time of Mironitch, that his drinking bouts had become more frequent; but they still declared that they did not wish any one else over them.

We drove out of Parashino at daybreak and made our halt by the Ik, that swift and deep and full river. We camped out at the last bridge on the most rapid branch of the stream. I had plenty of time to observe and admire the noble river, which is richly stored with fish. We halted more than four hours, and fished to our hearts' content; we caught crayfish too. That night we lay at Korovino, and about noon on the next day we saw Bagrovo from the hill. I was then in the carriage with my parents; there was plenty of room in it; and when my mother was not lying down, I and my sister were admitted there in turns; but I confess that my turn came oftenest. It was a fine hot day. My mother, sunk in the deepest gloom, sat in one corner of the carriage; my father was in the other, and he too seemed depressed, but I noticed that he could not refrain from a smile of satisfaction, as he looked down on the scene opening before our eyes—the reedy ponds, the green woods, the village, and the manor-house of Bagrovo.

CHAPTER XIV

WE ARRIVE AT BAGROVO TO LIVE THERE

WHEN we drove up to the house, my grandmother, who had grown much older in six months, and my aunt Tatyana, were already standing on the steps. Grandmother shed tears of sincere joy ; she embraced my parents, crossed herself, and said : ' Glory to God ! ' the real owners of the place have come. I never thought I should live to see you. Tanyusha and I have counted the days and hours, and looked, till our eyes were tired, along the road from Ufa.' We went straight to grandmother's room, the one which had been occupied by grandfather ; her old room had been given to her daughter, and a door had been opened between the two rooms. When we arrived, the pair were having their dinner at a small table beside grandmother's bed ; they were waited on by women only, all the men having been sent out to field-labour. Grandmother left her own dinner uneaten ; and the household bestirred itself in earnest to provide us with a meal. A bevy of maids hastened up and quickly laid the table in the parlour ; and very soon we all sat down to a fresh dinner. There proved to be a number of courses, as if we had been expected ; but all the dishes were so rich that my mother and sister and I rose almost hungry from table. Grandmother constantly spoke of grandfather with tears, and she ate a good deal ; after dinner she went as usual to lie down, while my parents arranged

about their instalment in their new quarters. The 'new room' for the young mistress—a name it always kept—was not yet completely furnished: two carpenters were at work in it, old Michéi and young Akim. For the time, we took the drawing-room and the corner room, which had been my aunt's, for our occupation. But the latter had lost all its charm, because the windows and all the side that looked out on the river were blocked by the addition of the 'new room'. This room was separated from the corner room by a short passage which opened on the garden; but the door had not yet been made. During the rearrangement of all the furniture we had brought from Ufa, and until order was restored in the house, Yevséitch took me out for walks, of course with my mother's permission; and we had time to inspect everything—the river Boogoorooslan, rapid and full of deep pools, which took a bend and flowed all along the garden; the summer kitchen, the island, the mill with its pond and dam. This time I was so pleased with everything, that one minute was enough to erase from my memory all the disagreeable impressions produced by my two former visits to Bagrovo.

My father was much occupied at first by starting on the business of managing the estate. Grandmother insisted on this; and he himself looked on it as a duty which he could not evade. But my mother, in spite of all requests, positively refused to undertake the management of the house, and, still more positively, to settle the payments due from the labourers' wives and household servants, and the spinning and weaving to be done by them. She declared very firmly, that she would live there

as a visitor and would undertake nothing, except to give orders for dinner to our town cook, Makéi, and this only on condition that grandmother should give orders for a dinner to suit her own taste, to her country cook, Stepan. On this point there was much discussion and debate. I noticed that my mother was in a constant state of irritation, and spoke sharply, although my grandmother and aunt spoke politely to her and even timidly. I once said to her, 'Mamma, you are displeased about something: you are always angry.' She answered: 'No, I am not angry, but I find my position painful. No one here understands me. Your father will be occupied from morning to night with estate business; and you are still too young to share my vexation.' I could not in the least understand what could be the cause of this vexation.

A number of changes were made in the house, before the new room was finished. The door from the drawing-room into the passage was closed up, and a new door opened into the corner room; the door from grandmother's old room into the pantry was also closed, and a new entrance made to the maids' room. All these changes certainly made for comfort and quiet; but as they were all due to my mother's contrivance, they were carried out with some grumbling. For a fortnight, the noise of carpenters at work never ceased in the house; there was not a quiet corner; and as the weather was fine, my sister and I ran about from morning till night in the court-yard and garden and in the birch wood, where jackdaws had already settled and which was afterwards called 'The Jackdaw Wood'. During this time I did no reading or

grandfather had planned for my mother's use, was now completely finished. A religious service was held in it; the fresh walls were sprinkled by the priest with holy water; and we moved into our new quarters. By 'we', I mean my parents and myself: my sister and baby brother lived in the corner room, which had been my aunt's, and was now turned into our nursery. My mother's room, always called 'the mistress's room' by the servants, was even more cheerful than the old corner room, being nearer the river. A spreading birch sapling grew on the bank and nearly touched the wall of the room with its boughs. I liked to look out of the window which faced the river; I could see the distant point where the green valley of the Boogoorooslan joined that of the Karmalka, and between them the steep bare summit of the Chelaef hill.

My father was in truth occupied with the business of the estate from morning till evening. Every day he drove to the fields; every day he walked to the stables and byres; every day he visited the mill. An official of some kind came from the town, read a formal document to the assembled peasants, and inducted my father into possession of the estate inherited by him from his father. All the peasants and their wives were then entertained to spirits and beer; they all bowed low before my father, embraced him, and kissed his hands and face. Many of them, as they spoke of my late grandfather, shed tears, crossed themselves, and said, 'The kingdom of heaven be his!' I was my father's only companion, and came in for a share of the kissing and embracing. I felt proud to be the grandson of my grandfather. I was no longer

surprised at the affection shown by the peasants to my father and me ; I felt that it could not be otherwise, because he was the son, and I the grandson, of Stepan Mihailovitch. Nothing would induce my mother to come out and greet the peasants and their wives : to all persuasions of my father, grandmother, and aunt, she persistently replied that the real mistress of the house and land was 'mother', meaning her mother-in-law. She sent this message to the peasants ; but my father did not give it : he said that their young mistress was not well. I thought that they were not pleased, it is probable that they all knew her to be quite well. I was vexed with my mother for not coming out to see the kind people, and ashamed to hear my father say what was not true. When we returned to the house, I spoke of this to my mother before them all, whereupon she reproved my father with some heat for not telling the truth. He was vexed, and said : ' I was ashamed to say that you were unwilling to be their mistress and unwilling to see them. What have they done to offend you ? ' There was another thing which I thought odd and disagreeable : while my father was being inducted into his estate, and while the peasants were shouting their congratulations and good wishes—' Health and long life to you, our father Alexyéi Stepanitch ! '—just then, my grandmother and aunt, who were looking out of the open window, fell into one another's arms with tears and loud cries of sorrow.

' What were grandmother and aunt crying about ? ' I asked, when I was alone with my mother. She reflected and then answered : ' They were thinking that they have had full control here

all their lives, and that now I, a mere stranger, am the mistress; that I might assume authority to-morrow if I chose, though I don't choose at present, and that your grandfather is dead. That is what caused their grief.'

'But why, mamma, did you not go out to see our kind people? They are so fond of you.'

'Because that would have made it worse for your grandmother and aunt; and besides I can't endure—but you are too young to understand me.' Nor could I induce her by my persistent questions to say one word more. I was long tortured by curiosity, as I puzzled over this question: 'What can it be that my mother cannot stand? Surely it cannot be our kind people, who said themselves that they were so attached to us?'

And now my aunts began to pay us visits. The first to come was Aksinya; I noticed no change at all in her: she was just as good-natured and kind to us as before. The next was Alexandra with her husband; and I saw at once that she was quite different. Not only had she become affectionate and respectful in manner; but she ran, as Parasha might have done, to do services for my mother; yet my mother showed no warmth towards her. The last aunt to arrive was Elizabeth with her daughters. The proud 'General's lady' did not fawn upon my parents like Alexandra, but she too was changed: her manner, which had been cold and haughty, was now attentive and polite. Even my cousins were different. Katerina, the younger of them, was naturally lively and gay; we had liked her best on our previous visit and wished to become close friends with her now. But the new politeness proved a barrier: she was so

reserved and cold with us, that we were repelled and found it impossible to feel for her as for a near relation. None of the aunts stayed long at Bagrovo.

At last the Chichagoffs came to us. My mother's sincere and keen pleasure in their visit communicated itself to me : I sprang into Mme Chichagoff's arms and embraced her, as if she were my nearest and dearest. My face must have revealed my joy ; for she looked at her husband and said with surprise, ' See, my dear, how glad Seryozha is to welcome us ! ' For the first time in my life M. Chichagoff took notice of me and patted me on the back ; at Ufa, he had never spoken to me. After this, his feelings towards me grew warmer every year ; and, as a schoolboy, I was quite a favourite with him. Mme Chichagoff's mother, Mme Myortvavo—for whom, as I was told, my late grandfather had great respect—had a reputation for exceptional tact and good sense. She occupied the rest of the party with her pleasant talk, while my mother carried off the Chichagoffs to her room, which was soon the scene of most lively and intimate conversation. Even I was told to go and join my sister in the nursery. This visit gave new life to my mother, whose spirits had been failing before. The visitors left after three days, having exacted a promise that we would come and stay a whole week with them.

Every year, it was the custom at Bagrovo to go hawking after quails, which were a favourite delicacy, whether fresh or salted, with all the household. This year, as usual, two hawks had been taken from the nest and reared in a coop. Philip, my father's old falconer, had one of these

seems to me even to have grown smaller ; nothing really interests her ; she has lost hold of everything. She speaks constantly of her loss ; she pays little heed even to her daughter. When I say that Tatyana ought to be settled in life, and that a husband should be found for her, she won't hear of it : she only says, " As God pleases, so it will be. "

My father sighed and said, ' Oh, yes, mother is quite changed , I don't think she will live long. '

I felt sorry for grandmother, and said, ' We ought to comfort grandmother and stop her from grieving. ' My father was surprised by my sudden interposition . he smiled and said, ' Yes, you and your sister should go and see her oftener and try to cheer her up. ' Accordingly, we began to go to her room several times a day. We usually found her sitting on her bed, with a spinning-wheel before her, spinning goats' down, while a number of girls, belonging to the house or estate, were squatting round her and cleaning the hairs out of the tufts of down. Each girl, when she had cleaned her tuft, handed it to the old lady, who held it up to the light, and if she found no hairs in it, laid it in a basket near her ; but if the tuft was not properly cleaned, she handed it back and scolded the girl for her carelessness. Grandmother's eyes were dull and leaden ; often she grew drowsy over her work ; sometimes she pushed the wheel suddenly away and said, ' What is the use of spinning to me ? Time for me to go to Stepan Mihailovitch ! '—and then she would begin to weep. At first, my sister and I did not know how to make advances to her : we only sat there for a little and then went away. But we learnt from our aunt how to please her. In spite of her indifference to

everything about her, she still kept her old liking for certain favourite dishes and dainties. Thus she was very fond of crowberries and of mushrooms fried in sour cream. Of the berries there were plenty in the kitchen-garden; our aunt went there with us and showed us the place; and the three of us picked a whole basinful and took them in to grandmother. She seemed pleased. 'Splendid berries,' she said, 'so large and ripe,' and ate them with enjoyment; she wished to give us some, but we said we dared not eat them without mother's leave. Next, our aunt showed us the place where the mushrooms grew. This was a hole or hollow in the centre of the court-yard, near my aunt's storehouse;¹ there must have been some building there once, as it was the only place where these mushrooms grew. Grandmother called this place 'the golden hollow'; and it was watered every day by Grusha,² a deaf girl with a squint. Again helped by our aunt, we pulled out of the very ground a plateful of button-mushrooms and carried them in to grandmother. She was very much pleased, and ordered the cook to fry a whole panful for her. We had again to refuse her offer to treat us to mushrooms; she made an impatient gesture, and said, 'Dear! dear! how odd you are!' Having earned her favour in this way, we began to talk on different subjects to grandmother; and she was getting more friendly and taking more notice of us, when an unexpected incident occurred which cooled my feelings so much, that for a long time I only said 'Good morning' and 'Good-bye,' when I paid her a visit. We were talking cheerfully to her one day, when

¹ See p. 330. ² i. e. Pear, a nickname.

a red-haired village girl handed her a tuft of down which had already been rejected once; grandmother held it up to the light, and seeing that there were hairs in it, with one hand caught the girl by the scalp, while with the other she pulled out a whip from under her pillows and began to lash the offender. I ran off. I was reminded of the National School, and felt no further wish to sit in grandmother's room, and watch her spinning at her wheel and the girls picking hairs out of the goats' down.

For a fortnight we had bad or, at least, damp weather, and then the bright autumn season set in. There was frost every night; and when I woke in the morning I saw all the ground, except where the sun was shining on it, covered with white sparkling hoar-frost. 'What a frost there is on the ground!' Yevséitch used to say, as he handed me my clothes to put on. And, in fact, the long and broad strip shaded by the house lay there like a white table-cloth, sharply distinguished from the damp dark soil beyond it. The strip soon grew small and crooked, as the rime disappeared at the first touch of the sun's rays, which had a good deal of heat in them even at the end of September. I liked to watch the sun routing the frost, and was pleased when the objectionable patch of white had entirely vanished.

I don't know why, but my father had never once taken me to see the farm-work. The reason he gave was that I should get weary, because he had to spend a long time there. The reaping was long over; most of the rye had been carried already to the stack-yard, the peas had been thrashed, and the poppy-heads shaken empty—and I had seen

nothing of it all ! At length, frost and sun had dried the remaining sheaves, and all went to work with a will, to finish the carrying, which was rather late that year. From grandmother's room I could see the wagons laden with sheaves slowly approaching our stack-yard. This novelty excited my curiosity, and I begged to go with my father, who was just driving off to the fields. 'Yes, you can come now,' he said ; 'I shall only make a round of the fields, and then stay at the stack-yard, sending you home with Yevséitch.' My mother gave her consent. As I had never once been in a cornfield since the time at Parashino, two years before, it was with great glee that I sat down beside my father in the cart. At starting, I suggested that it would not be a bad thing for him to take his gun, as he did sometimes ; and the gun went with us. My life in the town had, of course, given me no real notion of autumn in the country. Everything was new to me, and as delightful as it was surprising. We drove past a pond, where some remnants of ice were still visible on the sloping muddy banks ; a flock of ducks were swimming in the middle, and I asked my father to shoot one, but he pointed out that they were out of shot, and that no gun would carry so far. Then we went up a hill and came out upon the fields. The grass was withered and dark, and trailed on the ground ; the bare steep hillocks looked barer and steeper than ever ; the marmots' burrows seemed higher and more imposing, because the withered leaves had been blown off the wild-acacia bushes and no longer concealed the clay structures. But there were no marmots now : they had long been hiding in their holes, my father told me.

And now we began to meet wagons laden with corn. The frames of these were short, with a post at each corner; and the sheaves, very neatly packed in two rows between the posts, were kept in position by a weight on the top and firmly bound with ropes in front and behind. All this my father explained to me; he said that a load of this kind would not be upset or disordered on our steep roads; that a sensible horse, alone and unguided, would bring it home to the yard. In fact, the wagons were minded only by boys or girls; each walked cheerfully beside his or her horse, and bowed low on meeting us. When we reached the cornfields, we saw some men working. they loaded the wagons with long forks and then roped them and sent them off under charge of the children. We greeted the labourers and said, 'God speed the work!'—and they thanked us. We asked if they had seen any black-cock, and were told that any number of them had been sitting on the stooks, but they had all flown. So the gun was not of any use to us. Most of the labourers, my father said, were busy in the yard, where we should soon see them at work. 'But perhaps, Seryozha,' said he, 'you would like to see the women thrashing the buck-wheat?' Of course I said yes, and off we drove. From some distance we heard a dull sound like the tramp of many feet, but this was soon drowned by the shrill noise of women's voices. Yevsétch was contemptuous: 'What a noise they make,' he said, 'as if they were doing something useful! Women, by themselves, are like that.' The noise of voices grew louder as we got near, and then suddenly stopped. Yevsétch said scornfully, 'Ah! they've seen us, the magpies!' In one of the fields

a level space had been cleared and swept for thrashing; on this a tall heap of buckwheat straw was lying, and more than thirty flails were plying up and down over the heap. I had never seen this operation before, and was fascinated by the grace and dexterity of the regular rapid blows. The flails flashed in the air and fell nearly together, yet never got entangled, though the women did not stand still, but now advanced and now retreated. Their skill seemed to me 'incredible. Not to interrupt their work, my father did not greet them till they reached the end of the row. A foreman came up to us and said: 'They're going over it for the last time, *batyushka* Alexyéi Stepanitch. The straw was pretty clean before; but I told them to go over it once more. Now there won't be a grain left.' When they got to the end, my father and I gave the usual greeting, 'God speed the work!' and got the usual words of thanks from a chorus of female voices. On another thrashing-floor two labourers were winnowing a heap of the buckwheat grain: the breeze carried away all the rubbish and the light meagre grains, while the full and heavy grains fell, in a slanting rain, on the ground; a third man cleared away all the refuse with a broom. It was not hot weather for working; and as the people showed no signs of weariness, the thrashing scene did not produce on me the painful impression which I had felt in the harvest-field at Parashino. On our way home, we went straight to the stack-yard. I heard the foreman say in a low voice to Yevséitch, 'Ask the bailiff what he means by not sending a cart for the buckwheat straw. Has he gone to sleep?' Several tall stacks of rye had been built already in the yard.

When we arrived, they were just putting the top on one stack, and laying the foundation of another ; the first was wheat, and the second spelt. Four men stood on each stack ; the sheaves were raised to them on forks, or, when the stack grew high, tossed up neatly and quickly ; still greater was the neatness and quickness with which the builders caught the sheaves in mid-air. Great was my admiration, and I became finally convinced that labouring men and women were much more ingenious and adroit than ladies and gentlemen, because they could do things which ladies and gentlemen could not. I felt a burning desire to learn to work like a labourer. But my father found something to criticize here : he pointed out to the bailiff that the sides of the wheat stacks were uneven and ill-bult. The bailiff grinned as he answered :

‘ But those are rye stacks that you’re looking at, *batyushka* Alexyéi Stepanitch ; the wheat stacks will be quite different. Rye-straw is long, and wheat-straw short. That’s why the sheaves trail so.’

My father was rather put out, I thought. He stayed in the yard, intending to walk home himself, and sent Yevséitch and me back behind the horse. At home, I described to my mother all I had seen ; my enthusiasm and excitement over my story were as great as usual ; but I was mortified to notice—and it was not the first time—that she listened with indifference ; and, as for my wish to learn field-labour, she called it childish nonsense. I was hurt and went off to my sister, who was surely bound to hear my story out. But I must confess that she too was not much interested. Parasha was worst of all. When I began to

find fault with my sister for not attending and not being charmed by my descriptions, Parasha suddenly broke in : ' There 's nothing to listen to, and nothing wonderful in what you say. What need has your sister to know how corn is thrashed and stacks are built ? '—and she burst out laughing. I was so angry that I called her a fool. She threatened that she would complain to my mother ; but it was only a threat. When my father came back, he and I talked and talked of field-work. He respected agriculture and spoke of it with affection ; and it was pleasant to me to hear him speak and also to express my own thoughts and feelings, childish as they were.

It was quite late in the autumn when we set off on our visit to the Chichagoffs at Old Mertovtshina. My sister and the baby were left with grandmother ; my father only took us there and returned next day to his occupations at Bagrovo. Knowing this beforehand, I feared I should find the visit tiresome ; and, in case of emergency, I took with me my books which I had read more than once already. My fears were not realized. When my mother was shut up with Mme Chichagoff, old Mme Myortvavo made me sit beside her and talked to me for hours at a time. She was a skilful questioner and even more skilful as a narrator, so that I much enjoyed listening to her. She had seen much and suffered much in the course of her life, and her stories were more interesting than books. From her I got for the first time the real history of Pugatchóff's revolt,¹ to which I had only heard

¹ Pugatchóff was a Cossack, who raised a serious rebellion in the east of Russia ; taken prisoner by Suvóroff, he was executed at Moscow in 1775. Pushkin's *Kapitan-shaya Dotchka* contains an account of it.

casual references before. The poor lady and her family had suffered terribly at that awful time: her husband had been murdered by the rebels. I generally sat with her in the morning; and after dinner our host took me into his study. He was both an artist and an architect: he had built a church for his mother-in-law in the garden, near the house, and had painted all the ikons for it himself. He taught me what is meant by a mathematical instrument, an easel, and oil-colours, and showed me how to use the colours. Plan-drawing pleased me most of all: M. Chichagoff was skilful at it, and the compass and drawing-pen were for long favourite toys with me. The possession of such treasures seemed to me the height of happiness. To crown all, M. Chichagoff gave me *The Arabian Nights* to read. Scheherazade absolutely fascinated me. I could not tear myself from the book, and my kind host gave me two volumes—they were all he had—of the magical tales. At first, my mother feared that this reading would be bad for me: she said to M. Chichagoff that my imagination was excitable enough already, and that *The Arabian Nights* would make me dream all day on my feet. But he found means to convince my mother that the book would do me no harm. Without understanding his arguments, I was convinced of their justice, and delighted by my mother's consent. I don't think that any book has ever aroused in me such sympathy and interest. During our visit, I could only read the tales in snatches; yet I became entirely absorbed by them. Now and again I would run off to the bedroom which I shared with my mother, and open the book, merely to read a page—and I was lost in a world of dreams. Once

my mother noticed I was not in the room and came to look for me ; she found me so absorbed in reading that I never heard her coming into the bedroom or going out. She then brought our host back with her ; and it was long before I was aware of their presence : I had neither eyes nor ears for anything ; it was only M. Chichagoff's laughter that made me conscious of realities. My mother availed herself of the situation , here was proof positive of what she feared. ' You see for yourself,' she said, ' how apt he is to get carried away, and why I think it bad for him to read fairy-tales ! ' M. Chichagoff only laughed and said, ' That's all right ; it couldn't be otherwise ; I quite approve.' I was much alarmed : I did not believe that after such a flagrant instance of my propensity, my mother would give way a second time ; but, thank God, it all turned out satisfactorily. My mother let me keep the books, but forbade me even to look at them during the rest of our visit. For fear of worse consequences, I obeyed, though reluctantly ; and during the last days of our stay I paid even more attention to the stories of old Mme Myortvavo, and showed even more curiosity in my questions addressed to our host. He had read everything and seen everything ; his knowledge was universal, yet he was no mere student ; and besides all this, he was very cheerful and loved to talk. My admiration for his exceptional intelligence and parts grew greater every day.

There was another inhabitant of Mertovtshina who aroused in me curiosity mingled with fear. This was Ivan, a son of Mme Myortvavo ; he was still young, but had been insane for some years. Nothing would induce his mother to put him in

confinement: he lived in a separate part of the house, with a servant to look after him, walked about the fields and woods, and came whenever he chose, even at night, to the rooms occupied by his mother. I saw him two or three times every day, but always at a distance. At last, one day when we were all sitting in the drawing-room, he came in, unshaved, uncombed, and very oddly dressed. Muttering some words in Russian and French to himself, biting his nails, bowing repeatedly over his shoulder, he kissed his mother's hand, and then got out a card-table, which he placed in the middle of the room and opened; next he fetched a pack of cards. His sister said in a low voice to my mother that to play cards by himself was his only amusement, and that he was a very good player; to prove which, she asked her husband to play a game of piquet with her brother. M. Chichagoff at once agreed, remarking that he had often played with him but never won. I ventured close to the table and stood beside M. Chichagoff. The madman played astonishingly fast; often, without waiting for the scoring at the end, he made a mental calculation of the items and wrote down his gains or losses with chalk on the table; I was told that he never made a mistake. He made strange grimaces all the time, he laughed in a strange wild way, talked constantly, got up, bowed, and sat down again. He clearly supposed himself to be talking to some one; but this did not prevent him from playing with great attention and success. After losing several kings, M. Chichagoff said, 'No getting the better of you, brother,' and, getting up, brought from his study a few copper coins which he handed over to Ivan. The winner was excessively

pleased ; he then sat down beside his mother and talked to her for a long time ; his voice rose and fell, was now sad and now happy, but he always spoke with respect, and she listened with attention and sympathy. He mumbled so that it was impossible to understand a single word ; but his mother always understood him, and her eyes rested on him with a singular tenderness. At length she said :

‘ Well, my dear boy, I understand it all now. I will think carefully over your plan and give you my advice. Now go to your own rooms, and God bless you.’

He obeyed her at once : kissing her hand respectfully he left the room. We were all silent for some minutes ; the old lady’s eyes were full of tears. Then she crossed herself and said in a low solemn voice :

‘ God’s will be done ! But a mother can never become accustomed to the sight of her son deprived of his reason. My poor Ivan does not believe that the Empress is dead. He fancies that he is in love with her and that his love is returned, but that certain persons have slandered him ; and therefore he intends to write a letter in French to the late Empress.’

This was a complete puzzle to me, but at least I could understand the mother’s love for her afflicted son, and the son’s respectful obedience to his mother, in spite of his madness. The same day, on going to bed, I besieged my mother with a host of questions, which it was no easy task to answer in a way comprehensible to a child. My chief anxiety was the possibility of going mad myself, and for some days I kept a watch on my thoughts

and worried my mother with questions and doubts whether I had not got some symptoms of insanity. My father's arrival and our departure, fixed for the next day, drove the thoughts of this possibility out of my head. We drove away, and I could think of nothing but the meeting with my dear sister; I would read her *The Arabian Nights*, and tell her about poor Ivan. On the way, my mother talked much with my father of Mme Myortvavo: she praised her and said it was astonishing how that quiet old lady, who never raised her voice, could command such respect from all the household and such eagerness to carry out her wishes.

'Owing to their love and reverence for her,' my mother went on, 'not one of the family or visitors or even of the servants ever loses patience with her son or laughs at him, though he is often repulsive or ridiculous. Her power over him is such that even in the fits of violence which he sometimes has, it is enough for her to appear on the scene and speak a few words—the raging madman becomes perfectly quiet.'

All this was quite intelligible to me, child as I was, and was confirmed by my own feelings.

When we got back to Bagrovo, I lost no time in giving a detailed narrative of all that had happened at Mertovtshina, first to my sister and then to my aunt. I had an unbounded and unreasoning desire to convey my impressions to other people with such precision and clearness that their conception of the objects described should correspond exactly to my own; hence I began to mimic the mumbling voice and queer faces and bows of Ivan Myortvavo. I must have attained my object very completely; for I terrified my sister, and she ran from me,

or shut her eyes and stuffed her ears, as soon as I began to imitate the madman. My aunt, on the contrary, laughed a great deal and said, 'What a rogue you are, Seryozha! It's Ivan Myortvavo to the life.' This pleased me; and I repeated the performance before Yevsétch, Parasha, and others, making them laugh and praise my cleverness as a mimic.

On the first convenient opportunity I began to read *The Arabian Nights*; and for a long time the book dominated my fancy. I liked all the stories, and could not make up my mind which I preferred. They excited my curiosity, astounded me by the surprising nature of the wonderful incidents, and stimulated my own tendency to invention. The genii shut up in wells or earthen pots, the men turned into animals, the enchanted fish, the black dog which the lovely Zobeide flogs and then embraces with tears—how all these mysterious marvels impressed me as I read! With what avidity, with what insatiable interest I devoured these stories! Yet I knew all the time that they were mere inventions, descriptions of what never was and never can be in this world. What, then, is the secret of the spell they laid on me? I believe it is to be found in that passion for the marvellous which is innate, more or less, in all children, and was less repressed by sober sense in my case than in most. While reading the book I was carried away as usual by excitement and enthusiasm; but I was not content with reading it myself: I began to repeat the contents to my sister and aunt with such burning animation and what may be called self-forgetfulness, that, without being aware of it, I filled out the narratives of Scheherazade with

many details of my own invention ; I spoke of all I had read, exactly as if I had been on the spot and seen it with my own eyes. When I had excited the attention and curiosity of my two hearers, I began, complying with their wishes, to read the book to them aloud ; and then my own additions were detected and pointed out by my aunt, whose objections were confirmed by my sister. Again and again my aunt stopped me by saying :

‘ What you told us is not there. How ’s that ? You must have made it up out of your own head. What a story-teller you are ! It ’s impossible to believe you.’

I was much taken aback by such an accusation, and forced to reflect. I was a very honest boy at that age, and could not endure lying ; but in this case I saw myself that I had really put into Scheherazade’s mouth a great deal which she never said. I was surprised myself, not to find in the book what I believed I had read there, and what was firmly fixed in my head. I became more cautious, and kept myself in hand, until I got excited ; when once excited, I forgot all precautions, and my heated imagination usurped absolute power.

The late autumn dragged slowly on, no longer damp and rainy, but dry, windy, and frosty. Without any snow, the thermometer fell below zero ; mud turned to stone, and carts could drive over the ponds. In fact, it was real winter, but without sledging, to which all looked forward impatiently. I had long given up my walks, and spent most of my time with my mother in her new room ; there my crib stood, and there my books and pebbles and fishing-lines taken off the rods were deposited. My father had no study and no

room to himself. In one corner of the parlour stood a writing-desk of alder-wood, made in the house by old Akim, our carpenter; and here my father constantly sat and wrote. A blind old man might often be seen standing in front of him. This was his clerk, Pantelyéi Grigoritch—his surname, which was never used, was Myakoff—well known for his management of lawsuits and knowledge of law, though I was not aware of this till I was older. He was a man of genius in his own line; but how was it possible for such a development to take place under the roof of my grandfather, who could hardly read and write, and detested all law business? The explanation was this. Mihail Maximitch Kurolyessof¹, within a year after his marriage to my grandfather's cousin, noticed about the house at Bagrovo a fatherless and motherless boy known as Pantyushka, and formed the opinion that he was uncommonly sharp and intelligent. He offered to take the lad to his own house and educate him, that he might grow into a man of business, for my grandfather to employ in all his dealings with the provincial law courts. My grandfather gave his consent. Pantyushka soon became known as Pantelyéi, and showed such extraordinary parts, that Kurolyessoff, with my grandfather's consent, sent him to Moscow for further education, to a friend of his, a great jurist and a notorious taker of bribes. In a few years Pantelyéi was known as Pantelyéi Grigoritch, and had a high reputation in his profession. In Moscow he married a citizen's daughter, Natalya Sergéyevna, a pretty girl with a good dowry, who, for love or from respect for

¹ See *A Russian Gentleman*, Fragment II.

the ability of Pantelyéi Grigoritch, was not afraid to marry a serf. In the very prime of life, when he had just brought to a triumphant conclusion a case in which he was opposed by another long-headed lawyer, utterly defeating his old and wary antagonist, Pantelyéi was dining that very day with his client, when, as he sat at table, he suddenly lost his sight. The optic nerve was paralysed, probably in consequence of persistent reading of manuscript, constant writing, and want of sleep; and no means were successful in restoring his sight. For a year he was under treatment in Moscow; then he moved to Bagrovo with his wife and little daughter, Nastenka. Even when blind he was constantly employed on legal business by other people: agents brought him the papers and read them aloud, and he dictated petitions to the Senate, and was paid for his services a fee high for those days.

This was the man whom I often saw standing in front of my father, listening to documents and discussing any proceedings which my father intended to take. His image is before me now. He was a tall man, with good features and long fair hair with a faint trace of grey in it; he wore a long pea-green coat with large copper buttons, blue striped stockings with red clocks, and shoes with large silver buckles; and he leaned on a bamboo cane with a gilt knob at the end. He was a remarkable example of that old type of servant which is extinct now, and which is caught with great success by Zagoskin in his novels. Nothing would have induced Pantelyéi Grigoritch to sit down in my presence, to say nothing of my father's; and I could never persuade him to give up the practice of kissing my hand. His memory and his

gift of language were surprising : he knew by heart the text of all the laws and the exact date of every imperial edict. He had always one or two pupils ; they lived with him in the two rooms with a kitchen which he had built on to our house at his own expense, and read or wrote from morning to night under his eye, while he usually sat curled up on the top of the stove, smoking a short pipe. His hearing was so acute that he could distinguish all his regular visitors, even me, by their step. I would often have gone to hear his stories of Moscow, always accompanied as they were by a present of sweets from his wife or daughter, but the old man was unwilling to sit down in my presence ; and this fact, combined with the sweets, of which my mother disapproved, restricted the number of my visits to Pantelyei Grigoritch.

At last, when both man and nature, as my mother said, had long been waiting for it, snow fell in abundance ; and we made hasty preparations for a long journey. Praskovya Ivanovna insisted that my father should bring *all* his family for her to see ; and her will counted as law. We started, as soon as winter made travelling possible, at the season when the track is as smooth as a table-cloth, and one can still harness two or three horses abreast in a sledge. We took our own horses. I travelled with my parents in one sledge, the two younger children with Parasha and the foster-mother in another, made of matting and covered. I will not describe our journey ; with its stoppages for food and sleep, it was just as wearisome and uncomfortable as former journeys. I will only say that we stayed a whole day in the large village of Vishenki, the property of Praskovya Ivanovna. Just as at Parashino, so here there were com-

fortable and warm quarters for the agent on his visits ; indeed they were even better here. In the rooms once inhabited by the formidable owner of the place, there were pictures in gilt frames on the walls. To me they seemed marvels of art, especially one which represented a warrior with a barred helmet, carrying a spear and riding over a sandy desert. The people there said, with a smile, that the late Mihail Maximitch—the kingdom of heaven be his !—had been pleased to take all the pictures from his neighbours' houses ! Just as at Parashino, my father inspected the estate, but would not take me with him because of the cold. This village was famous for the prosperity of its inhabitants ; and they had a special fancy for thoroughbred horses, which had been introduced there by the late owner. Many of the old men brought presents to the house—honey in the comb, eggs, and live poultry. My father did not accept anything, and my mother did not leave the house to meet the old men. It was clear that the people looked on us as their future masters, though they included no settlers from Bagrovo.

From Vishenki we went on to the village known as Old Bagrovo, or Bagrovo near Simbirsk. We found there a tumble-down house, in which my grandfather and grandmother once lived, and where my father and all my aunts were born. I noticed that my father nearly shed tears when he went into the old rooms—family apartments Yevséitch called them—and saw the effects of age and decay, the sunk floors and sagging beams. These ruins found no favour with my mother. 'How could people live,' she asked, 'in such a hovel, and where on earth were they all stowed away ?' And it was really difficult to make out

how a whole family, including five daughters, could have found room in that house. Their requirements in the way of comfort and convenience cannot have been exacting. 'Seryozha,' said my father, 'this is our ancestral estate, which was bestowed on our family by the Tsars; but now half of it is no longer ours.' His last words produced on me a peculiar unpleasant impression, which I could not make plain to myself. We got there in the morning, and by dinner-time the court-yard was full of peasants with their wives. For some reason unknown to me, my mother, in spite of the frost, consented for once to face this assembly, and took me out with her. We were greeted with cries of joy, tears, and reproaches: 'What made you go and leave us, who were born your serfs?' they cried.

My mother, who did not like noisy greetings and demonstrations from dependants, was nevertheless overcome by the sincere feeling of our good peasants and shed tears; my father wept freely, and I began to yell! It turned out that there was nothing provided to enable us to treat the people; but my father promised to return in a week and make up for the omission. They answered that they wanted nothing; they only begged him to accept 'bread and salt'¹ from them. It was impossible to refuse, though we had positively no room in which to dispose of their gifts. After dinner, my father managed to inspect his own small property and found, as he said, all in good order. We went early to bed, and started for Choorassovo next morning some hours before dawn; the distance that remained was fifty versts.

¹ This phrase stands for 'hospitality', or, as here for 'presents' in general from inferiors.

CHAPTER XV

CHOOORASSOVO

WE fed our horses early in the village—formerly a town—of Tagai and arrived before dark at the village of Choorassovo, which had some reputation in those days. As we drove up to it, I saw that here was something different, something unlike what I had seen hitherto. Two stone churches with green cupolas—one small, the other large, new, and still unconsecrated—the red roofs of the large manor-house, of its outbuildings and offices, and the belfries on them—these were striking and surprising objects. When we drove up to the front steps, which were roofed over, a crowd of smartly dressed footmen hastened to meet us, helped us to dismount, and conducted us to the hall. There we heard that Praskovya Ivanovna had as usual a number of visitors, and that the company had not long finished dinner. My father and mother had scarcely had time to remove their travelling wraps, when we heard a loud clear voice in the parlour saying, ‘Oh, where are they? Bring them in here.’ The parlour-door was opened, we went in, and I saw a tall woman with hair turning grey, who quickly stretched out her hand to meet my mother, and said, ‘At last! I thought you would never come!’ My mother, as she told me afterwards, received a welcome so friendly and affectionate from our hostess, that in one moment she fell in love with our ‘benefactress’, and was heartily glad that she could feel real affection as well as

gratitude. Tears of emotion came to my mother's eyes, while Praskovya Ivanovna embraced and kissed her. This lasted some time ; then, stroking and fondling her, she took her to the window to see her better. My father, wishing to greet his aunt, tried to kiss her hand, saying, ' How are you, aunt ? '—but she would not attend to him. ' We are old acquaintance,' she said in her downright way : ' we have plenty of time to shake hands ; for the present, let me have a good look at your wife.' At last she said, ' Well, I believe we shall take to one another,' and then, turning to my father, embraced him heartily and whispered something in his ear. My sister and I had long been standing in front of our new relation, with our eyes fixed upon her, awaiting with some anxiety the time when she should take notice of us. At last our turn came. ' Oh, these are our Bagroffs,' she said in the same hearty voice ; ' I'm not very fond of kissing children. Well, bring them to the light where I can see them ' (it was beginning to get dark by this time). *My sister and I were placed on chairs near the window ; and the baby was carried there by his foster-mother.* Praskovya Ivanovna looked attentively at us ; then knitting her thick eyebrows, she said : ' What my late cousin Stepan Mihailovitch wrote to me was true : Seryozha is like uncle Grigori Petrovitch ; but the girl is like Cinderella, and the baby a little blackamoor.' She laughed heartily, took my mother by the hand and led her to the drawing-room, where a number of visitors were standing by the door ; introductions and greetings followed. Though I was inclined to resent these descriptions of my dear little sister and baby brother, I could not help

being impressed by the magnificence of the parlour. The walls were painted in bright colours with trees, fruit, and flowers which were new to me; there were strange birds too, and beasts, and men. Two large crystal chandeliers, which hung from the ceiling, seemed to me to be made of the diamonds I had read of in *The Arabian Nights*. Golden snakes with wings, fastened at intervals to the walls, held in their mouths candlesticks with candles; and crystal drops hung from them. Round the walls were placed a number of chairs, all covered with some red material. Before I had time to study all these marvels with due attention, Praskovya Ivanovna, accompanied by my mother and a young girl, who had kind and intelligent eyes though her nose was large and all her face scarred by small-pox, returned from the drawing-room and said in her commanding voice—

‘Alexandra, take Sofya Nikolayevna and her children to the rooms which I arranged they were to have, and settle them there.’

The girl with the scarred face was Alexandra Kovrigin; she was our cousin, and, having lost both father and mother in her infancy, had been brought up by Praskovya Ivanovna; her present position was that of chief executrix of our hostess’s orders. She was very cordial and pleasant, as she bestirred herself to instal us; and she and my mother soon became friends. We were given a large sitting-room, with one door leading to the dining-room and another to a bedroom, which was also to be ours. These were the two best rooms in the house; but Praskovya Ivanovna had never occupied them since her husband’s death; favoured guests were sometimes put there, while ordinary

visitors were put up in a wing of the house. We were told that the sitting-room looked much the same as in the lifetime of the late proprietor ; all spoke of him with awe. On one wall hung a picture in a gilt frame, representing a grey-haired old man fettered and in prison ; a young and beautiful woman—his daughter, according to Alexandra Kovrigin—was feeding him from her breast, while two monks looked in at the barred window and smiled. On the other two walls also there were pictures, but small ones ; one of these was a woman sewing, with eyes that seemed to be alive and directed towards any one who looked at her. In one corner stood a splendid mahogany writing-desk, inlaid in bronze, with a bronze rail and enamelled fittings to the locks. My mother decided to occupy the sitting-room ; and a large double bed, also of mahogany and with bronze ornaments, was moved there from the bedroom ; a sofa was fixed on as a bed for me, while the two children and the two nurses were established in the bedroom, which communicated directly with the maids' room—a convenient arrangement, my mother thought. When my mother had settled all this, she left the execution of it to Alexandra, and dressed for supper before a great mirror reaching to the floor, such as I had never seen in my life ; then she went to the drawing-room, and I was asleep when she came back after supper. There was evidently mirth and noise at supper, for loud voices and laughter were often audible to me through the dining-room. Alexandra kindly stayed a long time with us, and we took a great fancy to her. She looked sad as she asked me many minute questions about Bagrovo, my grand-

mother, and my aunts. I was by no means loath to gratify her; and before the evening ended she was well posted, not only in our life at Ufa and Bagrovo, but also in all my chief pursuits and amusements.

Awaking next morning, I saw the whole room lit up with bright sunlight: the gilt picture-frames, the chandeliers, the bronze on the desk and mirrors, were absolutely ablaze. Looking round the walls, I was arrested by the look of the woman sewing: she gazed fixedly at me from her gilt frame, just as if she were alive. I shrank from her gaze and turned away; but after a few minutes when I stole a glance at her, behold! she was looking attentively at me just as before. Feeling uncomfortable and even frightened, I hid my head under the coverlet and lay still, until my mother got up and went off to the bedroom, and Yevséitch came to put on my clothes. While I was washing, I took a sidelong glance at the figure: she was still looking at me and appeared to be smiling. I grew even more uncomfortable and imparted my trouble to Yevséitch. He made experiments from different parts of the room, and remarked the same thing. He was surprised at this peculiarity of the picture, but ended by coolly saying, 'It is the way the artist painted her, that makes her look straight at everybody;' and though I was not altogether satisfied by this explanation, yet I was comforted by the thought that the figure looked at Yevséitch exactly as it did at me.

The visitors were not yet all out of bed; and some who had got up drank tea in their rooms instead of coming down for it. We heard from

Parasha that our hostess had long been up and dressed and was having tea in her bedroom. My mother went and inquired of the confidential lady's-maid, whether she could see her aunt. 'Yes,' answered the voice of Praskovya Ivanovna. My mother went into the room and soon returned, looking very cheerful. 'Your aunt wants to see you all immediately,' she said. Off we went to the bedroom, where Praskovya Ivanovna gave us a welcome so simple and kind and pleasant, that I forgave her the nicknames of 'Cinderella' and 'Blackamoor', which she had bestowed on my sister and brother, and made friends with her once for all on the spot. She did not kiss any of us children: she looked at us a long time, stroked our heads, gave her hand to my sister and me to kiss, and said:

'I receive you thus in my bedroom, because it's the first time. I am no great lover of children, especially children in arms: I can't endure their screaming, and they are seldom sweet. Bring the children to me when I send for them. Seryozha, of course, is older, and he may be shown to visitors. The children will have all their meals in their own rooms; they will have the dining-room as well, to play and run about in. It's a mistake to mix up children and grown-up people. And now, my dear Sofya Nikolayevna, live in my house as if it were your own. State your wishes, give your orders—they shall be obeyed. When you want to see me, you are welcome here; if you don't want to see me, sit all day in your own room: I shan't be offended; I can't endure tiresome people myself. I love you as if you were of my own blood, but I don't intend to put any constraint

on myself on your account. All guests in this house are in that position. I don't make myself troublesome to any one, and I expect others not to make themselves troublesome to me.'

With this explanation Praskovya Ivanovna, who was pouring out tea for herself, asked my father and mother to share it, and told us to go to our own rooms. I ventured to beg leave to look again at the painting on the parlour walls, and asked if we might call her 'grandmother'.¹ She laughed and said :

' So you are a lover of pictures. Then go with Yevsétch and have a look at the parlour and drawing-room, and the hall, where the paintings are best of all. But don't touch anything, and don't call me grandmother, but merely "Praskovya Ivanovna".'

I do not know why she disliked that title; anyhow, we never called her by it as long as she lived. I was not slow to avail myself of her permission, and made off with Yevsétch to the parlour, which seemed to me even prettier than on the evening before, because I was freer and could look more minutely at the frescoes. It is quite certain that the artist was some domestic painter, not superior to the workmen who nowadays paint signs over barbers' shops; but I was enchanted then by the Chinamen and Red Indians, the palms and beasts and birds, shining in all the colours of the rainbow. In the drawing-room, where we went next, I was not so much struck by the frescoes, of which there were few, as by the gilt picture-frames and rich furniture of the room, though it

¹ This name may be given by Russian children to a grand-aunt.

seemed to me at the same time rather dark and cheerless, probably owing to the muslin and silk window-curtains. What splendid sofas there were, what a number of arm-chairs, all covered with dark blue silk! A great chandelier hung from the middle of the ceiling, and large figures, carrying candlesticks, stood on stone pedestals in the corners of the room. By the sofas at the sides of the room were columns, decorated with bronze and carved out of different woods; and what wonderful birds, beasts, and even men were sculptured on them! But I was especially attracted by the broad mirrors, reaching from the ceiling to the floor; marble stands were fixed against them, supporting bronze candlesticks with crystal pendants. Compared to the houses I had seen and lived in, and especially to Bagrovo, the house at Choorassovo was bound to seem, and did seem, to me like a palace out of *The Arabian Nights*. The hall, to which we went after the drawing-room, was just as luxuriously furnished; I was past being surprised, but I liked this room best of all. There was a wide divan along the whole length of the inner wall, and sofas in corners, covered with some bright red material; and they seemed to stand in green arbours made by the bushes painted on the walls. The lightly curtained windows, and a glass door leading to the garden, let in plenty of light and gave a cheerful air to the room. Praskovya Ivanovna liked it too, and constantly sat or lay on this divan, when the company was smaller and consisted of intimate friends.

Together with Yevséitch, whose cries of astonishment were louder than mine, I surveyed and admired all the wonders and treasures—I thought

them so then—that adorned the house of Choorassovo. Then I hastened back to my room, eager to communicate my impressions to some one. But in the nursery I found Alexandra, talking to my sister and caressing my little brother. She told me that her ‘aunt’ was deeply engaged in conversation with my parents, and had sent her away with the words, ‘Please be good enough to leave the room’ As it seemed to me that Alexandra was hurt by this speech, I tried to console her: I hastened to inform her that Praskovya Ivanovna had turned all of us out of her room, and had forbidden me to call her ‘grandmother’. Alexandra smiled sadly and said:

‘She doesn’t like to be called grandmother; she told me to call her “aunt”, and I have got accustomed to the name. I am the same relation to her that you are; but I am only a destitute orphan, and you are her heirs.’

I did not understand; but there was a sadness in her tone which made me sad too, but not for long. Suddenly I thought of the pictures and splendid furniture in the house, and began excitedly to describe to my sister and the others the wonders I had seen. Alexandra smiled again and again; at last she said in a low voice, ‘What a child you are!’ I was taken aback, and cooled down before the end of my description. Then she began to question me again about my grandmother and Bagrovo. I thought to myself, ‘Fancy speaking of Bagrovo, after Choorassovo!’ But clearly she was not of my opinion; she went on asking me questions about the smallest trifles. Then she told me her own story: how her parents had lived in poverty and want, till both died;

and how Stepan Mihailovitch, her grandfather and mine, took her to live at Bagrovo, till Praskovya Ivanovna came there and carried her off to Choorassovo, which had been her home for the last sixteen years. She was interrupted by the entrance of a tall stout woman, no longer young. Her face was unknown to me ; but she proceeded to kiss us. She was called Dárya Vassilyevna ; her surname I never heard. Her dress was somehow strange : her clothes were good, but she had a handkerchief tied round her head, as peasant women wear it. I heard afterwards that Praskovya Ivanovna generally made her presents from her own wardrobe, requiring her to wear the garments and not shut them up in her box. I did not take a fancy to Darya Vassilyevna at first sight, and I noticed that she was unfriendly to Alexandra ; but I was convinced later that she too, though laughable, was a kind-hearted woman. Praskovya Ivanovna had known her long, and favoured her, especially for her fine voice, which she kept after her youth was past. She began a chat, not with us but with Parasha and the foster-mother. Alexandra was not pleased : she whispered to me, ' She has come to pump the maids,' and left the room. Being now free, I carried off my sister to the bedroom where I slept with my parents, and, forgetting Alexandra's disconcerting remark, I began again my description of the drawing-room and hall, exaggerating as usual. My little sister was sorry that she had not seen these rooms and the parlour, which she had scarcely glanced at the day before. We began to discuss, in our own fashion, all our new acquaintances. My sister was so fond of me that she

shared all my opinions; and she and I never differed about anything.

Meanwhile the house, which had been still and empty during my inspection, began to get populous and lively. Visitors appeared in the drawing-room and hall; and our hostess with my parents came out to meet them. Alexandra also appeared, to perform her duty of entertaining the visitors. On this occasion there were fifteen of them, and I will give some of their names: Alexander Karamzin and his wife; Nikita Philosoffoff and his wife; M. Petin and his sister; M. Bedrin, a landowner, whom Praskovya Ivanovna scolded and made fun of to his face; M. Lyenivtseff and his wife; and Pavel Minitzky and his bride. The last two were known as the handsome couple, and Praskovya Ivanovna was very fond of them; both were young and handsome and warmly attached to one another. Before long, the Minitzskys and my parents became close friends. Living thirty versts from Choorassovo, they came once a week, and even oftener, to visit Praskovya Ivanovna. *On that first day my father brought them to our rooms, where they made much of us and we took a great fancy to them.* Just before dinner, my mother came for us and took all three of us to the drawing-room. Praskovya Ivanovna showed us to her visitors, with this preface: 'Here are my Bagroffs; I ask your kindness for them. How like Seryozha is to uncle Grigori Petrovitch!' They all showed much attention to us, especially to my sister, and said she would be a beauty some day, which delighted me. On the score of my resemblance to some extinct ancestor no one expressed any doubt, because none of

them had ever seen him. I did not care very much for the visitors, except the Minitskys whom I knew already, and least of all for one young lady, some relation of my father's, who was perpetually making faces and had a strange way of making her eyes start out; she was constantly scolded by Praskovya Ivanovna, but only laughed.

Just before dinner, we were sent off to 'our wing', which became the regular name for our three rooms. Up till now we had always dined with our parents, except when my mother was ill and during her visit to Orenburg; and even then we were not alone, but had the company of our grandparents and aunt; and I did not at all like this separation and solitude at our dinner. Nor did I conceal this feeling from my mother; she understood it perfectly and shared it, but she said that we must do as we were told by Praskovya Ivanovna, who was very kind and fond of us. 'Besides,' she added, 'I hope before long to arrange it somehow.' She went out; and we two sat down sorrowfully in the big dining-room, where the end of a table, at which a dozen people could have sat, was covered for us. There were a number of footmen, and they began to run about and make a great noise; they not only talked and laughed loudly, but wrangled and pushed each other and nearly came to blows; and maids, apparently even more numerous, were constantly running to meet the men. From the dining-room a passage led to the maids' room, so that the dining-room served as the only means of communication in the house; on its polished wooden floor there was a regular track from the passage to the men's room. And now my sister and I saw

and heard things of which we had no comprehension before and which we were, fortunately, unable to comprehend then. Yevséitch and Parasha, who never stirred from our side, were themselves surprised and even shocked by the impudent shamelessness and licence of these servants. I heard Yevséitch whisper to Parasha: 'What's this! Where have we got to? A fine house it may be, but there are fine doings in it! It's highway robbery in broad daylight!' Parasha's reply was to the same effect. Meanwhile we had been completely forgotten. The remains of the dishes, as they were brought out of the parlour, were snapped up instantly and devoured by greedy maids and men. Ivan, the butler, politely called 'the cashier', had only one object in view: with due deference, he begged them not to touch the dishes before they had been handed round at table! Yevséitch was at his wits' end. All his demands and representations that 'the children must have something to eat' were entirely disregarded; and the 'cashier', a quiet sober man, answered with a sigh:

'But what can I do, Yephrem Yevséitch? You see yourself how they behave! Every night when I go to bed, I thank God that my head is still firm on my shoulders. You must ask for a separate meal for the children.'

Yevséitch was in despair that we should remain 'without a bellyful'; there was no one to complain to: all the ladies and gentlemen were at dinner. But my zealous and warm-hearted attendant soon took decisive measures. First of all, he removed us from the dining-room to the sitting-room, shut the door, and told Parasha to lock it

on the inside. Then he hastened to the kitchen himself, searched out some scullion who belonged to Bagrovo, and told him to make soup for us and roast some meat in the oven. Then he came straight back and waited for the end of dinner, intending to send some one at once to summon my mother, and to inform her of all that had happened in the dining-room. But, as soon as we heard the noise of chairs moving back from the table, Alexandra came in haste to our room. When she heard that we had not begun our dinner, she became very excited and indignant, and called the butler to explain. Being afraid of the servants, he lied shamelessly: he said that nothing came out from the dinner, so that there was nothing to give us. Though Alexandra, representing to a certain extent the mistress of the house, knew perfectly well that this was a mere falsehood—though she was well acquainted with these servants and had suffered much herself from them, still even she could not believe that anything like our recent experience was possible. She summoned the major-domo Nikolai and even Mihailushka, the chief agent, told them the whole story, and vowed that, if it ever happened again, she would inform her aunt. Nikolai replied that the servants were entirely out of hand, and that Praskovya Ivanovna had long been aware of this; and Mihailushka, whom I looked at with great interest, clearly sided with the servants: he said with much dignity that it was the cooks' fault, that a meal would be served at once, and that he thought it unwise to trouble Praskovya Ivanovna with such trifles... They had hardly gone out when my mother came in. Alexandra, much excited,

embraced her and asked her to forgive what had happened to the children. 'If it comes to my aunt's ears,' she added, 'all her wrath will fall on me, though I am quite innocent.' My mother reassured her very kindly, saying that it was a mere trifle, and that the children would have a meal later—she had heard already that food was being prepared on purpose for us: Praskovya Ivanovna should never hear of it. Thus comforted, Alexandra went away to join the visitors; and I began to give my mother details of all I had seen and heard. She was so distressed by my story that she flushed all over and nearly cried. She thanked Yevséitch warmly for removing us from the dining-room, gave orders that we should always dine in the sitting-room, and laid strict injunctions upon him and Parasha that they must let none of the house servants come near us. Then Yevséitch and Parasha went out, taking my sister with them.

When alone with my mother, I put my arms round her neck and at once asked her many questions about what I had seen and heard. She was much taken aback and found it difficult to answer me. I had long known very well that there were good people and bad people, and I used the latter term to define all evil qualities and vices. I knew that there were masters who give orders and servants whose business it is to obey, and that I myself, when I grew up, would belong to the former class, and others would obey me; I knew that till then I must *ask*, for the fulfilment of any of my wants. But Praskovya Ivanovna I looked on as a supreme authority, whom all, even we ourselves, were bound to obey; it was, therefore, difficult to explain to me why her servants refused,

under her very eyes, one might say, to obey her orders. I remembered perfectly her saying to my mother, 'Just give your orders, and all will be carried out.' At first I thought that the men and women who devoured the dishes were simply hungry and needed food; but I was told this was not so, which increased my disgust for them. Their coarse jokes and allusions were, of course, lost on me; and in their shameless behaviour I saw only roughness and rudeness, such as I had seen before among the boys of the National School; and my mother did not enlighten me on this point. I asked many questions about Alexandra, her position in the house, and her relation to our benefactress, Praskovya Ivanovna; but to these my mother gave no answer, and had recourse to the usual evasion, 'You are still too young to understand about that.' Meanwhile, the quiet butler and Yevséitch brought in our dinner and summoned my sister; we had a fine appetite by this time and enjoyed our food, all the more because my mother sat with us.

After our belated dinner, my mother went back to the visitors, and my sister and I set to work to arrange my personal possessions, which consisted mainly of my books, paper, ink-bottle, and ruler. But besides these I was the owner of a wonderful box, adorned with ivory carving and containing eight drawers full of my treasures—the fossils, Devil's Fingers, and other rare pebbles. One of the drawers contained my hooks and fishing-lines, sinkers and floats. All the eight drawers could be shut at once with a very cunning lock, the secret of which I revealed to no one except my sister. For this marvellous box the very best

and most conspicuous position was cleared : we placed it on the writing-desk and took the opportunity of examining, perhaps for the hundredth time, all my precious things. My father soon came in, and heard of our belated meal ; he was very sorry for it, but could not stay because he was playing piquet with our hostess. Tea was brought us immediately after our dinner ; tea over, my mother came and said she would not go back again to join the party : Praskovya Ivanovna herself had sent her off, seeing from her face that she was tired. Indeed, she seemed exhausted and went to bed immediately after our little supper. I was glad of the opportunity to be alone with her, and meant to question her on points that puzzled me, when Alexandra appeared unexpectedly. She was evidently attached to my mother ; for she often embraced her and spoke to her very affectionately. As they talked low, I could not hear all that passed ; but I made out clearly enough that Alexandra was complaining of her sad lot, even with tears, though she explained that she did not blame her aunt, but only her own unhappy fortune. I was sorry for her, yet I soon fell asleep, lulled by the low voice in which she spoke.

On waking next day, I heard a lively conversation going on between my parents. They had no reason to get up early, and they had matter for conversation, as during the whole of the preceding day they had not had one spare minute to spend alone together. Giving no sign that I was awake, I listened with close attention. My mother spoke warmly of Praskovya Ivanovna, praising her plain good sense, her frank, cheerful, and direct nature, and her way of speaking, which, if sometimes sharp

and unceremonious, was always straightforward. While I was asleep the evening before, Alexandra had had time to communicate many particulars about her aunt; but, in my mother's opinion, she misunderstood that character when she saw in it nothing but caprice and eccentricity. My mother repeated what Alexandra had said; it was to the following effect:

Though every governor, on his appointment to the province, made a point of calling on her, Praskovya Ivanovna herself had no affection or respect for any one, and invited her guests either with an eye to her own amusement, or in order to treat them rudely to their faces. To save herself trouble, she paid no attention either to her own affairs or those of her peasants, leaving everything in the hands of her agent, Mihailushka, who was enriching himself at the expense of the peasants, and had utterly ruined the servants of the house by his indulgence, as could be seen from the way in which they had behaved to us, who were to inherit the property. She was very eccentric, detesting priests and monks and never giving a penny to a beggar, saying her prayers when she felt inclined, and, when she was not inclined, walking out of church in the middle of the service; and though she paid her parish clergy very highly, she would never admit one of them into her house, except a priest bearing a crucifix on the great festivals. Her chief amusement in summer was the garden, to which she attended like a paid labourer; her winter pastimes were singing or listening to singing, reading, and playing cards. 'Praskovya Ivanovna,' she added, 'has no affection and shows none for me, a poor orphan, and

never gives me any money, though she allows me to order from the town or buy from travelling merchants whatever I choose. Respectable and disinterested people have often pressed her to settle some sum on me in her lifetime, with a view to my marriage, but she would not hear of it, and said that the Bagroffs would never allow a kinswoman to starve, and that it was better for me never to marry at all than to be troubled with a husband, who would marry such a pock-marked goose for her money and then take his revenge by ill-treating me.'

To this my mother added, that Praskovya Ivanovna, from her own experience, knew better than most what it was to be married to a fortune-hunter.

Overhearing all this, I felt very unsettled in my mind. If my mother had not begun by saying that Alexandra was mistaken in her opinion of her benefactress, I should have believed the niece's account, because she seemed to me so sensible and kind and honest. I turned suddenly to my mother, and asked her; 'Is it possible that Praskovya Ivanovna is so bad?' She started and said:

'If I had known you were awake, I would not have spoken of this before you. You are quite mistaken in supposing that Alexandra is complaining of her aunt; that is all nonsense, mere bad guessing and misunderstanding on your part. I beg you will say nothing of this to your sister or Yevséitch or Parasha.'

I floundered still deeper in confusion, and for long was completely puzzled by this question: Is Praskovya Ivanovna good, or is she only partly

good ? I confess that I had an involuntary leaning to the side of the niece.

Considering the matter now without prejudice, I am bound to say that Praskovya Ivanovna was by no means an ordinary woman, and that the existence of such a personality, at that time and in the sphere to which she belonged, is in itself surprising. While still a child, she was married by her mother's relations to a dangerous ruffian ; she actually underwent all the horrors we read of in old romances and French melodramas ; and then she lived twenty years after her husband's death. Taking advantage of the independence secured to her by her wealth and the moral purity of her whole life, she was perfectly free and even wilful in the expression of all her thoughts and feelings. Disregarding calculations of self-interest, and surrounded by general respect which she fully deserved, this woman, though quite uneducated, was free from many of those vices, weaknesses, and prejudices which held undisputed sway over the society of those days. She was just both in deed and word, strict with all alike and especially with herself ; she blamed herself severely for even slight departures from the moral principles which she recognized ; and, more than that, she did all she could to correct her mistakes. For want of education and enlightenment, it was impossible for her to rise above the level of her age ; and therefore she was blind to her obligations towards the 1,200 serfs who were in her power. As she valued a quiet life above everything, she took no part in the management of her estates, declaring that she had no gift for it, and appointed Mihail Maximoff, a domestic servant of her own,

to the post of chief agent. But she made no mistake about his character and did not trust him blindly as people supposed. She used to say :

‘ I know that Mihailushka is a rogue : he does not forget to feather his own nest : he makes money out of peasants who have saved, and is making a purse for himself. I know that ; but I also know that he is a clever man and not ill-natured. I want my peasants to be well off, but I don’t want to hear their quarrels and complaints. I might get twice as much income as I do, but the present state of things will last my time, and there will be something left for my heirs.’

She was convinced that her peasants were prosperous and contented ; for she often made inquiries into their condition, sending trusty and devoted agents to the neighbouring villages to investigate. And it was true, as every one knew, that her peasants were well off ; but, owing to her system of management, the swarm of servants in and about the house were sunk beyond belief in idleness, insolence, and vice. If she happened to see any of the men-servants intoxicated, she ordered Mihailushka to pack off the culprit to the army : ‘ No good,’ she said, ‘ letting that fellow loose among the peasants.’ If she noticed forward behaviour in a woman, again her orders were issued to Mihailushka : the offender was to be banished to some remote village to mind cattle, and afterwards to be married to a peasant. But these sentences, harsh and cruel as they were, were never pronounced except when the mistress herself detected the culprit under her very nose ; and, as this very seldom happened, the result was, an

utter lack of discipline in the household. She saw nothing and knew nothing, and did not at all like to be told of anything of the kind.

She was pious without the least trace of bigotry : in the matter of fasting and other observances of the Church, she claimed complete freedom. She had built a large new church of stone, because the old church reminded her of her husband who had built it ; and she wished to forget him, and never spoke of him. She liked magnificence and display in the house of God ; she knew the church service by heart, and sang in the choir, standing among her own private singers. Sometimes she stayed away from church for a long time, not attending even on the great festivals ; at other times, she had frequent celebrations of the Mass. Sometimes, while praying devoutly, she would say that she did not wish to pray any more, and would go out at the beginning or middle of the Mass ; this was her chief peculiarity and, more than anything else, surprised and grieved her niece, Alexandra. Though she could hardly write, she liked to read novels or listen to them ; and, as she ordered a supply every year, she got together a tolerable collection of books, which had, however, been started by her husband. Religious books she read only on fast-days, never at other times ; but this did not prevent her from playing piquet, by way of relaxation, on the evenings of those days, with my father if he was there, or with Alexandra. At such times she used to say that it was much less sinful to think about *pique* and *repique* than to listen to empty gossip at the expense of her neighbours, or give up her mind to idle thoughts. She did not always observe Lent, but fasted two or

three times a year when she felt inclined, not confining herself to the strict diet, if she was unwell. Monks and nuns were an abomination to her ; and no black cowl or black hood ever ventured into her presence.

Though she was very reluctant to lend money, and did not like to spend trifles in relieving beggars, yet, when she heard of some respectable person overtaken by disaster, she was generous in her aid. But, as disasters seldom overtake respectable persons, the occasions of her munificence were rare ; and, in general, Praskovya Ivanovna was not considered a kind woman. If the truth must be told, of kindness in the ordinary sense of the word, and especially of tenderness and sensibility, she had not much ; or one might say with more truth, that these qualities were not much developed in her ; and besides, she chose to hide them rather than wear them on her sleeve. It is true that she did not love many people ; for she loved no one whom she did not respect. Out of all her large acquaintance, her favourites were the Minitskys, and, in later days, my mother. Lastly, it is also true that her manner to her visitors was too unceremonious and sometimes even rude : she said ' thou ' to all alike, and showed no mercy in telling people to their faces of anything amiss which she had heard about them or had noticed herself. All felt, more or less consciously, that Praskovya Ivanovna took little interest in other people, and lived chiefly for herself, avoiding anxieties and enjoying her cheerful untroubled life. But this did not prevent a constant ebb and flow of crowds of visitors at her house, or a general expression of profound devotion and respect for her. There

could be no interested motives in the case, because it was not easy to get anything out of her. The reason for the exceptional popularity of her house is therefore to be found in the qualities of the hostess : she was always inclined to talk, animated, gay, and fond of a laugh ; her guests had to tell news, or talk scandal, or draw the long bow, according to their talents ; and life at Choorassovo was comfortable, unconstrained, and amusing. Unfortunately, the complaints of Alexandra were not altogether unjust. In her conduct to the two regular inmates of her household, Praskovya Ivanovna was inconsiderate and exacting ; they were no more than privileged maid-servants. Darya Vassilyevna, a stupid old woman, did not feel the humiliation of her position ; but Alexandra was far from stupid and naturally kind ; and, as she did not fully understand the many good points of her benefactress and was unable to establish better relations between them, she suffered many mortifications ; and only the friendship of the Minitskys and my parents lightened the burden of her position.

I have described Praskovya Ivanovna as I knew her myself in my early manhood, and as she long lived in the recollection of my parents and others who were intimately acquainted with her and understood her thoroughly.

Life at Choorassovo went like a clock : relays of visitors arrived and departed. Every day my mother rose in the good graces of Praskovya Ivanovna, and every day increased her friendship with Alexandra, and still more with the Minitskys. They were a really noble pair, especially the husband, who combined with the artistic tempera-

ment of a Little Russian vigorous activity, stainless honour, and strict principles. Passionately in love with his beautiful wife—and she was no less devoted to her handsome husband—he worked with wonderful perseverance to correct her early training and root out the seeds of coquetry and vanity which had been planted in her fine character while she was a child. My mother arranged her day very well, thanks to the complete freedom which Praskovya Ivanovna permitted and even encouraged in her house. She always dined with us, a full hour before the regular dinner. So she ate little at the later meal, and at first the loud cheerful voice of our hostess was often heard to say, ‘Sofya Nikolayevna, you are eating nothing;’ but, when she learnt that her guest had already made half a meal with the children, she laughed and ceased to press her. When Praskovya Ivanovna sat down to cards, my mother came to us; but it was seldom possible to have her to ourselves, even less so than in the morning; for Alexandra or the Minitskys, if not engaged, often came then to our large room. The ladies lay down on the large double bed, Minitsky sat on the sofa, and conversation began, which often became so lively and intimate that my sister and I were sent off to the dining-room or nursery. But my mother did not approve of this change for us, because the dining-room was still a regular thoroughfare between the maids’ room and the men’s; and the maids often even looked into the nursery. My sister and I went every day to say good morning to our aunt, but we did not say good night. Sometimes, when the party consisted of intimate friends, I was summoned to the

drawing-room or hall after dinner, and Praskovya Ivanovna was entertained by my replies, at times rude and bold, to the questions put to me, which were often puzzling and sometimes absurd and unsuitable to my age. Sometimes she made me recite from the *Rossiad* or the tragedies of Sumarokoff. I felt that the company were amused, not interested, by my performance; I resented their attitude, and this was why I sometimes answered questions with an impertinence which was neither natural to me nor suitable to my age. When we were alone, my mother scolded me for this conduct; but I answered that I was vexed when people made fun of what I said, and talked to me only in order to laugh at me. In general, my father was little with us: he spent much of his time with the visitors and constantly played cards with his aunt; at other times he summoned Mihailushka, who was one of the best pupils of our old friend Pantelyéi Grigoritch, and pored over law papers with him. I discovered now that my father's conversations at Bagrovo with our blind man of business were directed to a practical object; for he was bringing a lawsuit against the Bogdanoffs, with regard to an estate which had come by inheritance to my grandmother. For this purpose my father went to the town of Lukoyanoff and entered a petition there. He was absent much longer than he intended, and I was vexed to see that my mother quarrelled with him more than once on that ground after his return.

I forgot to say that my father went to Old Bagrovo and gave an entertainment to our good peasants there. As a matter of course, I asked for a minute description of this event, and was pleased

to hear how sorry they were for the absence of my mother and the children.

I have said already that there was a fairly good library at Choorassovo. I lost no time in availing myself of this treasure. authorized by Praskovya Ivanovna, I took out books chosen by my mother, and read them with great enjoyment. The first books that came into my hands were *Cadmus and Harmonia*, by Cheraskoff, and *Polydorus, Son of Cadmus and Harmonia*, by the same author. These books were to my taste in those days; for the florid style and cadences of the poetical prose seemed to me perfection. Next I read *Arphazad, a Chaldean Tale*—the author's name I forget—and *Numa, or The Palmy Days of Rome*, by Cheraskoff, and many other books of the kind. I glanced at some novels too, which were the favourite reading of Alexandra; they excited my sympathy and interest; but my mother would not allow me to read them, and I only ran through a few pages by stealth. I confessed what I had done to my mother, and she scolded me for it very mildly. In this fashion, I was able to glance at *Alcibiades*, and *Count Valmont, or The Error of Judgement*, and *The Memorable Life of Clarissa Harlowe*.¹ It was long before I had a chance of reading these books through; but scraps of them had made such a deep impression on my mind, that I never ceased to think of them and was not easy till I had read them. At Choorassovo I came at last upon *My Trifles* by Karamzin, and his collection of various pieces with the title, *The Muses*. These verses were quite unlike the poetry of Sumarokoff and Cheraskoff. I was conscious of the difference, but the

¹ Richardson published the first part of this book in 1749.

matter of these verses did not satisfy me, in spite of my immaturity. The contents of all these new books, and the talk of the visitors, many of whom were complete strangers to me, gave me much food for thought ; and I had plenty of leisure time to think in. I tried to discuss everything with Yevséitch ; but he could not even understand what I meant, or what I wished to learn, or what my questions were about. Often and often he said to me : ‘ How can you expect to know the why and the wherefore of everything, my little falcon ? That ’s a thing even old men don’t know, and you are a child still. God wills it so, and that ’s enough. Much better go and look at pictures.’

This manner of life went on with little variation for more than two months ; and in spite of the splendid house—as I then thought it—in spite of the frescoed walls, which I liked better than pictures and never ceased to admire ; in spite of the old and new songs which Praskovya Ivanovna sang often and sang very well in a chorus, and which I always heard with pleasure ; in spite of the quantity of new books which I eagerly devoured—this life became very wearisome to me. I was impatient to leave the stir of Choorassovo for the peace of Bagrovo and our poor house there ; I even missed my grandmother and aunt. But the chief cause of my boredom, as I clearly perceived even then, was this, that I spent so little time alone with my mother. It had been my regular custom to pour out without reserve all my thoughts and feelings into her loving ears, to try all my impressions by her wise judgement, to listen to her animated talk and to find in it an inexpressible pleasure. But at Choorassovo we were

constantly hindered by the Minitskys and still more by Alexandra; they even distracted my mother's attention from me; and many new questions and doubts and suppositions, constantly suggested to me by the new people and new objects, remained unsolved and unexplained, neither approved nor condemned by her authority. This was a cause of constant uneasiness to me. My love for my sister grew steadily warmer; her friendship was a great comfort to me, but, as I was older and more developed than she was, it was possible to communicate my thoughts to her, but not to ask her advice. There was probably another cause, which I did not realize at the time, for the boredom I suffered: this was the loss of perfect freedom. I was mostly confined to one room. I was not allowed to stay long in the nursery with my baby brother, whom I was beginning to be very fond of; he had pretty dark eyes, though Praskovya Ivanovna, Heaven knows why, had actually called him a little blackamoor! If I was ever allowed to go to the dining-room, it was only for a few minutes, and the presence of Yevséitch was indispensable. Praskovya Ivanovna I did not understand: I took it on trust that she was kind, but I never liked her treatment of us children. She once ordered our baby to be whipped for crying loudly! I am glad to say that my mother did not obey that order.

For all these reasons it is very natural that I was much pleased when our departure began to be talked of. Praskovya Ivanovna had clearly become very fond of my mother; for she put off our departure several times.

‘What is there for you to do there in that hovel?’

she used to say ; ‘ Your mother-in-law won’t miss you, let alone her daughters. I put no pressure on you ; but it is pleasanter to live where there’s some society.’

My mother did not contest her arguments ; but my father, with quiet persistence, let his aunt know that it was impossible for us to stay longer : for three posts he had had no letters from Bagrovo from his sister Tatyana ; his mother was in weak health and could not attend to the management of affairs ; since his father’s death she was quite changed and very restless and unhappy. He added that the corn was being ground with very poor results, and that he would have nothing to live on. His aunt replied that this was all nonsense, and offered him not the smallest assistance from her purse. At last, our preparations were made and our hostess consented to let us go, having exacted a solemn promise from my parents, that they would return without fail at the end of summer and spend all autumn with her.

‘ Yes, my dear,’ she said to my mother, ‘ you have never seen Choorassovo yet. The time to see it is summer, when all the trees are covered with fruit and all the springs—I have twenty of them—are spouting. Don’t fail to come. If your husband can’t come, come alone and bring the children, though I have no great fancy for children. Perhaps the best plan would be to leave the youngest, the little blackamoor, with his grandmother ; he can scream there as much as he likes ! If you don’t come, I shall be angry.’

My parents promised faithfully to come. Though I did not in the least expect it, Praskovya Ivanovna gave me several books ; the actual

volumes were *Cadmus and Harmonia* ; *Polydorus, Son of Cadmus and Harmonia* ; *Numa, or The Palmy Days of Rome* ; *My Trifles* ; and *The Muses*. This present went far to reconcile me with our hostess. We left on the day after my father's birthday, i. e. on February 22nd. On our return we took the same route, by Old Bagrovo and Vishenki. Without reckoning several days which we spent at these two places, we were travelling for more than eight days ; the journey was the most wearisome and uncomfortable I had ever experienced ; the snow was terrible, and there was a blizzard every day. Sometimes the track had entirely vanished, and in some places we had to have men walking in front to guide us. On the eighth day we reached Nyeklyoodovo and spent the night with the Kalpinskys, from whom we learnt that my grandmother and aunt were well. Early next day, when we had drunk our tea, we started again ; and two hours later I saw from the hill Bagrovo, which I had now grown to love.

CHAPTER XVI

BAGROVO AFTER CHOORASSOVO

BAGROVO was a dismal place in winter, and was bound to seem still more dismal to my mother after Choorassovo. Lying in a hollow between hills, surrounded on three sides by bare leafless trees and on the fourth side by barren heights, and covered with snow-wreaths from which the thatched roofs of the peasants' huts peeped out, Bagrovo had a terribly depressing effect upon my mother. But my father and even I saw it again with pleasure: there he had spent his childhood and I was beginning to spend mine. In truth, when compared with the rich village of Choorassovo which was almost a town, Bagrovo looked like the winter quarters of some nomad tribe. At Choorassovo the peasants' houses, with their wooden roofs and large windows, stood high and looked cheerful; the snow was so worn by traffic that it did not seem deep round the houses and in the street; the court of the manor-house was kept swept, and sand was strewn over the road at the entrance. But at Bagrovo the snow was so deep round the peasants' cottages that a passage had to be dug to each; the court of our own house, owing to its extent, seemed even more desolate, and the drifts seemed deeper, while over their tops ran separate tracks, like paths on a mountain, leading to the kitchen and servants' quarters. There was no sound nor sign of life. The buildings, buried in the snow, looked low and unlike their

former selves. It surprises me more than I can say, that I did not feel this scene to be gloomy and sad.

Soorka and the other dogs met us in the court with cheerful barks of welcome ; two maids looked out to see whom the dogs were barking at, and then dashed back to the maids' room. Next, my aunt hurried out on the steps. Glad as she was to see us, my grandmother was still more so : from her eyes, which were cloudy and colourless and seemed to have no light in them, large tears rolled down. She thanked my father and especially my mother, kissed her hands, and said, ' I did not expect you ; for the letters told me that Praskovya Ivanovna had taken a fancy to you, and I knew she would urge you to stay, and she cannot be disregarded.' I felt now the full value of my father's good-natured firmness, which had proved too much for his aunt, though she was to leave her immense property to him and was accustomed to have all her wishes complied with.

My mother was much vexed to find quite half the house unheated. From some strange motive of economy, grandmother, not expecting us to return till just before the snow melted, had not ordered our particular part of the house to be heated. It could not be helped : we were all put up in my aunt's room, and she moved to be with her mother. In three days, all was put to rights, and we settled down where we had been before.

Rich in the possession of new books and new ideas, which grew clearer to me in the stillness of solitude and unbroken freedom—freedom of which my life at Choorassovo had taught me the true value—I constantly talked on one subject or another with my mother, and was pleased to

discover that I had become older and wiser. I knew this, because my mother and other people discussed with me matters which earlier they had avoided. The course of our life was regular and uniform. The frost was still severe, and for long I was not allowed to take walks, nor even to run across to Pantelyéi Grigoritch and his wife. But my father at once began to have interviews with his blind man of business, and I listened with interest to their conversation. My father described minutely his journey to Lukoyanoff, his dealings with the district judge, the petition he had entered, and the promise of the judge that he would not fail to decide in our favour. But Pantelyéi Grigoritch smiled at this, placed both hands on the knob of his long walking-stick, and said :

‘ Better not trust the judge : he will favour the landowner on the spot ; we shan’t manage it without an appeal to the Senate. When the time comes, I will draw up a petition ; and then some one will have to go to Moscow and make interest with the secretary and chief-secretary, whom I used to know when they were less exalted persons. But never you fear, Alexyéi Stepanitch, my dear sir : our case depends on law, and we can’t lose it. The only thing they can do is to defer the decision.’

My father could not at once believe that the judge at Lukoyanoff would deceive him : he smiled and said : ‘ Very well, Pantelyéi Grigoritch ; we shall see what the decision is in the provincial court.’ In the sequel, the prophecy of the blind man of business was fulfilled to the letter.

The weather grew less severe, and at last Shrove-tide came round. My sister and I went sleighing ; and for the first time in our lives we saw the village

boys and girls coasting fearlessly down the slope from the stack-yard on skates and sleds. I felt that I had not sufficient courage for this diversion ; but the noisy merriment of the children was cheerful to watch. One would fall headlong, and another, dashing down upon him, go head over heels in turn ; and their loud laughter echoed over the snow-covered fields and hills, which the sun's rays were just beginning to warm. We had a little toboggan-run of our own in front of the bedroom windows, made by Theodore and Yevséitch ; I was not afraid to come down this with my sister ; but where there were only two of us, it was not so amusing as in the noisy crowd of children collected from the whole village. But we were not allowed to join them.

There was an incident which marks out that Shrovetide in my mind. Some guests, who had never been to the house before, paid us a visit—Pelagéya Ardalionovna Rozhnoff and her son 'Mitinka'.¹ Though not very old, she was very stout herself, and he was so monstrously fat that the pet name by which his mother called him sounded especially absurd. It was not, however, only the bulk of these visitors that excited the curiosity of myself and all the household, but also the cause of their visit. Mme Rozhnoff wished to marry her son, and they came to inspect a possible bride in my aunt Tatyana. In view of such an important occasion, my aunt Alexandra had been specially invited. My mother took a lively interest in the affair, and was very anxious that Tatyana should be married. In former times, no one had wished

¹ A double diminutive of Dmitri : 'Mitka' is the usual form.

this more eagerly than grandmother, but now she was failing fast and incapable of any eager desires.

On the appointed day, all was ready for the reception of the visitors at ten in the morning : the house was scoured and swept, and the furniture arranged with special care ; the serving-men, who generally wore what they pleased, were smartened up and had pomatum on their hair ; and so it was with all the maids. My aunt was dressed in her best clothes ; even poor grandmother was made to wear a silk jacket and skirt, with a silk handkerchief over her cap, instead of the scrap of cloth she used to wear there, which had once been white but had hardly been changed since grandfather's death. In a word, the whole house looked as smart as possible, and ready for some high festival. Only my mother wore her ordinary clothes, and so did we children. At last a cry was raised, ' They're coming, they're coming ! ' Grandmother, who now walked with difficulty, was led hastily to the drawing-room ; and my father, mother, and aunt repaired to the same place. My sister and I and even the baby, of course with our usual attendants and all the maids, occupied the windows of my aunt's and grandmother's rooms, to watch the guests arriving and getting out of their sledges. And it really was a sight worth seeing ! First a covered leather sledge drove up to the door, and two sturdy footmen pulled their stout mistress out of it with some trouble, and brought her up the steps, where she halted. Next came a low sledge of remarkable size, in the depths of which something was seated that looked like a haystack or a smallish Kalmuck tent. The two footmen were quite insufficient in this case : they were reinforced

by our man Theodore, by Nikolai who belonged to my aunt. and two more of our servants. The united efforts of six men proved sufficient to release the love-sick swain from his vehicle and haul him up the steps. When the visitors entered the hall to take off their wraps, all the maids rushed head-long to the passage and the pantry, to watch the suitor and his mother walk through the parlour into the drawing-room. The door from grandmother's room into the hall was generally kept locked ; but Parasha unlocked it and left it ajar, so that we could see the mother and son, as they freed themselves of their winter coverings and warm wraps. They really were an astonishing couple ! Unable to restrain myself, I said aloud to Yevséitch, ' I declare, it's Mavlyootka ! ' ¹ Yevséitch, who could hardly help laughing aloud, pressed his hand over my mouth. At the door of the parlour, the visitors were met by my father ; after many bows, fine speeches, and embraces on both sides, he conducted them to the drawing-room. All our group were astonished at the huge size of the suitor. ' There's a fine lump ! ' said Yevséitch as he took us back to our rooms ; ' he beats even Mavlyootka ! '

The words ' bridegroom ' and ' bride,' ' courtship ' and ' marriage,' had long been known to me. and my mother had explained what I may call their outward meaning, as far as it was possible and right for me to understand them. Applying my notions to the case in point, I said to Parasha and Yevséitch : ' How can aunt marry Rozhnoff ? It is a wife's duty to help her husband ; but she is so slight and he so huge, that if he fell down she

¹ See p. 136.

could not lift him.' Parasha laughed and answered by a question, 'Why on earth should he fall down?' But I was prepared with an unanswerable argument: I said that I had once with my own eyes seen my father fall down, and my mother lifted him up and helped him to his feet. Afterwards, when my aunts heard what I had said, they made me repeat it (but always when my mother was not present) and laughed so much that I was completely puzzled.

When we two were summoned to dinner, all the party were already seated at table. Mercifully, we only bowed to the visitors; otherwise, I feared they might smother us with their embraces. During the whole of dinner I never took my eyes off the suitor; it was positively awful to watch him eating; I noticed that no one could help watching his plate. His mamma was no mean performer with the knife and fork, but she found time to speak in praise of her son. According to her, he was the quietest and kindest of men, who would not hurt a fly; at the same time he had a thorough knowledge of agriculture, went himself to the fields, understood everything and looked after everything; his one amusement was coursing. Her only complaint was on the score of his weak health; she took such care of him, that she made him sleep in her own room. Then, with a sort of wink, she added: 'Mitinka will have quite good health, when he marries; and if God sends him good fortune, his better half will be a lucky woman.' While saying the last words, she looked meaningly at my aunt Tatyana, who blushed, bowed down, and looked at her plate. The suitor must have eaten too much; for immediately after dinner he

began to doze. His mother said in excuse that he was accustomed to lie down after dinner; but, seeing that in another moment he would roll over and begin to snore, she ordered her horses to be put in; and then with a shower of excuses, allusions, and compliments, she carried off her poor invalid. When they had gone, there was much jesting and laughter; and my aunt declared that nothing in the world would induce her to marry such a man, so fat and so lazy. I was glad to hear it. The suitor was given to understand that the lady was unfavourably impressed; and the formal courtship went no farther.

CHAPTER XVII

MY FIRST SPRING IN THE COUNTRY

IN the middle of Lent a rapid thaw set in. The snow began to melt quickly and water appeared everywhere. The approach of spring in the country had a remarkable effect on me. I was conscious of a new and peculiar excitement. This was due a good deal to what I heard from my father and Yevsitch. Both rejoiced in the spring, partly as sportsmen, partly as men who had grown up in the country and felt a 'passionate love of nature', though they were not quite conscious of it, had never defined it to themselves, and never in their lives used the words which I have just applied to them. Finding in me an eager sympathizer, they could not resist the pleasure of describing to me the joys of spring. First the snow on the hills would melt and pour down their sides in torrents; the sluices of the dam would be raised, and the water spread everywhere. Fish would be swimming over the fields and get caught in traps and snares. The migratory birds would return, the larks begin to sing, the marmots to wake from their sleep and whistle, sitting erect on their burrows. The fields would grow green, the trees and bushes would clothe themselves, and the song of the nightingale would fill them with melody. Their simple but enthusiastic descriptions went deep into my heart, striking some unawakened chords and exciting in me unfamiliar feelings, troubling and yet sweet. We three were unlike

the rest of the household : to us it was not sad or wearisome to watch the darkening roofs and walls of the buildings, the bare branches of the trees, the soaking wet ground, the dirty heaps of snow, the grey sky, the fog and damp in the air, and the rain and snow which fell together or alternately from the low dark clouds. Though confined to the house—for in wet weather I was not allowed even to stand on the steps—I followed none the less closely each stage of advancing spring. From every room, almost from every window, I had noted certain places or objects, by means of which I carried on my observations. From the new room, i. e. from our bedroom, I could see on one side the Chelaef hill, whose steep round top gradually grew bare of snow, and on the other side a part of the river, which had melted long before, with the farther bank. From the drawing-room, dark bare patches could be seen on the Kudrinsky hill, especially by a round pond fed by springs, which was used as a flax-dam. From the parlour window, a pool which flooded the ' Jackdaw Wood ' shone like a mirror. From grandmother's room, I could see the stack-yard at the top of the hill, and along the slope a quantity of marmots' burrows which rose higher every day above the snow. The patches of bare earth grew broader and longer ; the pool in the wood spread farther ; the water came through the fence and was visible between the cabbage-beds in the kitchen-garden. By me every change was noted exactly, and each step of spring was hailed as a victory. From morning till night I ran from room to room and posted myself at my points of observation. All my occupations were forgotten—reading, writing, games with my

sister, even conversations with my mother. Of what I could not see for myself, I received regular reports from my father and Yevséitch, from the men and the maids :

‘The surface of the pond is blue and swollen ; it is dangerous to drive over it, and a man with a sledge fell in ’—‘the water has risen to the level of the machinery in the mill ; grinding is impossible, and it is time to raise the sluices ’—‘Antony’s dyke came down in flood last night, and the Mórdoff dyke is dark and swollen ; it will soon be impossible for sledges to pass anywhere ’—‘the paths are getting washed away ; we can’t get to the kitchen ; Mazan fell down with a basin of soup and spilt the soup ; the gangway is covered and the servants’ bath-house is flooded.’

Such were the reports I was constantly hearing, and I heard them all with delight. For some time the jackdaws had been walking about in the courtyard, and they were now beginning to build in their own wood. The starlings and larks arrived ; and then the wild birds, called ‘game’ by sportsmen, began to appear. My father told me, with delight, that he had seen swans flying so high that they were scarcely visible, and long skeins of wild geese. Yevséitch had seen divers and mallards alighting on the pond, rock-pigeons about the stack-yard, thrushes and lapwings round the springs. How many sensations for me ! how I shouted for joy ! The floods rose and rose, and no time was lost in raising the sluices. And I was not there ! The weather was too bad, I did not venture even to ask leave to go ; but my father’s description did something to satisfy my curiosity. Every day my reports became more frequent, more important,

and more tantalizing. At last Yevséitch, in wild excitement, declared that birds of every kind were there in such multitudes that they were jostling each other; and the limits of my endurance had been reached. It was no longer possible for me to hear all this and not see it; and backed by my father's approval and my own tears and eager entreaties, I wrung from my mother permission to go out, on condition that I was well wrapped up, for the wind blew damp and piercing. I was allowed to sit on the little veranda, just opposite the river and looking out on the garden. The inner door was still blocked up; and Yevséitch carried me round the house, as there was water and mud everywhere. And indeed, one who has never seen it can form no idea of what I then saw going on in the sky, on the earth, and on the water; nor can it be seen now in the same place, because the number of migratory birds is less nowadays.

The river had left its banks, and covered the trees and bushes on both sides; next, it had spread over half the garden and united with the lake in the 'Jackdaw Wood'. The edges of the water were crowded with wild birds of every kind; a multitude of ducks were swimming on the water, between the drowned tops of the bushes; and, all the time, large and small flocks of different birds were on the move—some flying high and steadily, others low and often alighting, and others moving from one point to another. The air was full of their calls, cries, and whistles. I did not know what bird was flying or walking there before me, or what importance it had; nor could I distinguish their calls; I was awe-struck and stunned by the

spectacle. My father and Yevséitch, who were standing beside me, were much excited themselves. Each kept pointing out birds to the other, and named them, often deciding by the note, for only the nearer birds could be distinguished by their plumage. 'Pintails! pintails!' cried Yevséitch in a flurry, 'flocks and flocks! And mallards too, I declare, beyond counting!' And then my father struck in: 'Can't you hear the snipe, how they're drumming? But they're terribly high up. And look at the rollers playing over the wheat-field, a perfect cloud of them! What a host of ruffs too! I never in my life saw such flocks!' Though I could not then understand the scene before me, and only looked and listened while my pulse seemed now to stop, and now to beat like a hammer, yet it all came before me later, as it does now, clear and distinct; and it gave me then, as it gives me now, unutterable delight. And to think that the sportsman alone is capable of understanding this fully! I, while yet a child, was a sportsman at heart; so my feelings on my return to the house may be guessed. I seemed, and could not but seem, a crazy half-witted creature: my eyes were wild, I could see nothing and heard not a word of what was said to me. Claspings my father's hand, I kept my eyes fixed on his face; I could not bear to speak to any one else, or on any other subject than what we had just seen. My mother was angry, and threatened that she would not let me go out unless I became sensible and cleared my head at once of ducks and snipe. Good heavens, how utterly impossible! Suddenly there was a report close to the house: I rushed to the window, and saw a little cloud of smoke clearing away, and

the old falconer Philip standing there with his gun, while the poodle Triton—generally known as Tienton—stepped out of the water holding a bird in his mouth by the wing. Philip soon came in with his spoil ; it was a mallard, I was told ; and the plumage was so lovely that I long lingered over it, admiring the velvety green head, the purplish throat, and the curve of the dark green tail-feathers.

By degrees I became accustomed to the approach of spring and its various sights and sounds, always new, startling, and delightful ; I say 'accustomed', meaning that I ceased to be stupefied by them. The weather became warm ; and my mother made no objection to my going to the veranda ; I was even allowed to run about where the ground was dry, and my sister with me. Every day one or other of the men shot a duck or snipe ; Mazan even killed a wild goose and brought it to my father in triumph ; he described minutely how he crawled through the reeds up to his neck in the water, till he got close to a pair of geese swimming on the pond, and how he aimed at one of them ; and he ended his story with the words, 'As soon as I hit him, he turned right over that very minute.' Old Miséitch, a man who could read and write, brought in large fish of different kinds every day—pike, tench, and perch. I was fonder then of fish than birds, because I knew and loved angling ; I imagined each big fish at the end of my line, and pictured to myself how he would have struggled and flapped, and how joyfully I would have hauled him out on the bank.

In spite of all precautions, I somehow caught a chill, which led to a cold and cough, so that I was

forced to stay shut up in the house, which to me seemed as tedious a prison as any I had read of in my books. Further, as I was much excited by Yevséitch's tales, he was forbidden to report to me the perpetual changes which spring was bringing with it. My mother hardly stirred from my side; she was not quite well herself. On the first day, disappointment made my fever worse; but I soon grew more resigned and played all day long with my sister, or read a book, constantly running, if only for a minute, to the windows, from which I could see the whole extent of the floods in the kitchen-garden and half the flower-garden. It was possible to see birds too from there, but I was not allowed to stand long at the window. My recovery was delayed by an unaccountable attack of sleeplessness; and this put my mother off her sleep, as she slept best in the early part of the night. To send us to sleep, we took the advice of my aunt and summoned to our aid Pelagéya, the housekeeper; she was a capital hand at telling fairy-stories, and even my late grandfather had been fond of listening to her. My mother had known of this before; but she had no love for fairy-tales or for people who told them, and she consented with reluctance on this occasion.

Pelagéya was stout and no longer young, but her complexion was still red and white. She came into the room, said a prayer, and kissed our hands; then she heaved several sighs—a regular custom with her—repeating after each sigh, 'Lord, have mercy on us sinners!' Next she sat down by the stove, rested her head on one hand, and began in a rather sing-song voice, 'In a certain country, in a certain kingdom. . . .' The story she told us

was called 'The Scarlet Flower'.¹ I need hardly say that I stayed awake till the story was ended, so that I slept even less than usual. The story proved so attractive and so exciting to my imagination that it might have cured me of sleeping too much, if that had been my ailment. It sent my mother to sleep at once; but when she awoke some hours later and found that I had not been asleep, and was discussing the story with Pelagéya, she sent her off; and it was very long before fairy-tales were again used in the house to send people to sleep. This prohibition might have been a great grief to me, had not my mother allowed Pelagéya to tell me fairy-stories occasionally in the day-time. The very next day I heard 'The Scarlet Flower' a second time. From that time till I was quite well again, i.e. till the middle of Passion Week, Pelagéya told me every day one of her large stock of fairy-tales. Those I remember best are, 'The Maiden Queen,' 'Ivan the Fool,' 'The Bird with Fiery Feathers,' 'The Dragon that lived in a Mountain.' I was so much taken up by the

¹ This tale, which I heard at least a score of times in the course of a few years because I liked it so much, I afterwards learnt by heart, and used to tell myself, with all the interjections, grimaces, sighings, and groanings of Pelagéya. I imitated her so well that every one in the house laughed to hear me. Then I forgot it, naturally; but lately, when reviving my memory of the past, I came unexpectedly upon a number of fragments of the story: many words and expressions started into life again, and I tried to recall it. The strange combination, oriental fancy and construction and many phrases obviously translated, and the manners and language of Russian peasants, and the traces of successive narrators—all this seemed to me remarkable. To keep the continuity of the narrative, the tale is given in an Appendix. (*Author's Note.*)

stories that I wearied less for the free air and felt less longing for reviving nature and flooded fields and the realm of all the returning birds. On Holy Saturday the court-yard was dry, and my sister and I were walking about in it. On that day my father and my aunts Tatyana and Alexandra—the latter was staying with us for the occasion—went to Nyeklyoodovo to spend the night and to greet Easter Day in the house of God there. The journey was very difficult ; for the floods, though abating, were still high. They crossed over the dam of the mill-pond in peasants' carts, and drove through the fields for some distance. The water came up to the axles ; and I was told by the men who escorted them on horseback, that my aunt Tatyana was frightened and screamed loudly, but her sister Alexandra only laughed. I heard Parasha whisper to Yevséitch, ' That one fears nothing,' and I was astonished at my aunt's courage. On Thursday in Holy Week the dyeing of Easter eggs began ; red and blue sandal-wood, broom, and the tops of onions were used, and the eggs came out red or blue or yellow, or pale pink, or chestnut. My sister and I watched the process with great satisfaction. But my mother had a special art of dyeing eggs a mottled colour, by means of scraps of cloth and Armenian silk ; and besides, when the egg was dyed, she could scratch upon it with a common penknife the most artistic patterns and flowers, with the words, ' CHRIST IS RISEN.' She prepared an egg like this for every one ; but I alone watched her at her labours. My egg was the prettiest of all and bore the inscription, ' Christ is risen, dear little Seryozha.' My mother was very sad not to hear the service on Easter morning, and

was surprised that grandmother bore this deprivation so coolly ; but grandmother, who had been very pious, was past nearly everything by now.

I went to sleep at the usual time, but for some reason woke up suddenly in the night. The room was brightly lighted, the doors of the tabernacle were open, and before each ikon burned a wax candle with gilt paper round it. My mother was on her knees, reading in a low voice from the prayer-book and weeping as she prayed. I felt an irresistible desire to pray with her, and asked if I might. She started at my voice and seemed disturbed, but gave me leave to get up. I jumped out of bed, fell on my knees, and began to pray with a peculiar fervour which I had never felt before ; but my mother had risen from her knees and soon said, ' That is enough ; go back to bed.' I read in her face, and heard in her voice, that I was a hindrance to her prayers. With all my might I tried to go to sleep at once, but my childish excitement and the emotion which I could not explain did not soon calm down. At last my mother, having ended her prayers, put out the candles and lay down on her bed. The bright light was extinguished, and only the lamp burnt dim before the ikons. I do not know which of us went to sleep first. To my great annoyance, I overslept myself and woke to find my mother fully dressed. She took me in her arms, wished me a happy Easter, and gave me the egg which she had ready ; then she went to grandmother's room. In came Yevséitch bringing his Easter greeting with a yellow egg. ' For shame ! ' he said, ' you've slept too long. Surely I told you you ought to watch the sun rising on Easter Day

and dancing for joy at the Resurrection.' I was much vexed myself and dressed in haste; then I looked in on my sister and brother, kissed them, and ran on to my aunt's room, from which the sun was visible, and though it was now high in the heavens, I looked at it through my fists. The sun seemed to me to move up and down, and I called out loudly; 'Yevséitch spoke the truth—the sun is dancing for Easter!' My mother came out of grandmother's room, smiled at my excitement, and took me to wish grandmother a happy Easter. She was sitting in grandfather's arm-chair, wearing a silk dress and a silk handkerchief over her head; in her festival dress she seemed more sunken and older than ever. She did not intend to break her Lenten fast till the Easter cakes were brought back blessed from the church; but my mother, saying that she would have tea with cream¹ in it, took me away with her.

My father and aunts returned before noon, just after my sister and I had been allowed to go out. The return journey was easier, because the floods had fallen a great deal in the night; they brought with them Easter cakes, hard-boiled eggs, and salt baked on Holy Thursday; all these had been blessed in church. The table was laid in the parlour, and we all met there to break the fast. To tell the truth, the fast had not been properly kept, except by my father and his mother and sister: my mother had fasted in Passion-week only—and she had had tea with cream in it that morning—and my sister and I only on the last three days; yet we were hungrier than the rest,

¹ While fasting, Orthodox Russians abstain from butter, eggs, and milk, as well as from meat.

because we did not get the ordinary Lent diet, but fish-soup, bread and tea, and honey. There were special cakes for the servants: from inside and outside, they all gathered in the hall and parlour, and, after the Easter greetings, each received a piece of Easter cake and two dyed eggs. First they crossed themselves and then began to eat. Noticing that our cake was much whiter than what the servants got, I asked out loud, 'Why is the cake which Yevséitch and the rest are eating less white than ours?' My aunt Alexandra replied at once in an angry voice, 'That's more of your nonsense! People get worse cake than that.' I tried to ask another question, but my mother said it was no business of mine.

So the fast was broken, and the order was given an hour later to serve dinner. As the day was warm, even hot, my sister and I were allowed to stay in the court-yard and run about. The servants' children, in their best clothes—which meant in some cases a clean shirt—with their faces washed and their hair smoothed, were all running about amusing themselves and beginning to roll their eggs along the ground, when suddenly the attention of all was attracted by two men coming down the Kudrinsky hill on foot. They came wading through the water past the submerged bushes, and made straight for the ford. The servants at once collected and soon recognized them as the old miller, Boltunyónok, and Vassili Petroff, one of the young outdoor servants. Both were returning from the Mass at Nyeklyoodovo. Their purpose was clearly to wade through the floods to the summer-kitchen, which was connected by a gang-way with the high bank of our court-yard; and

the folly of this attempt proved to all that they were not sober. They evidently wished to avoid the long round by the dam. Though the river had fallen so much that in most places it was not more than knee-deep, yet there were many holes and deep places round the kitchen—in summer these were cleaned out—where the depth of water was considerable. At once it was feared that the pair might stumble into a hole and be drowned; such an accident was quite possible, even for sober men. My father was informed; he came at once and saw the danger. He gave orders to harness a horse instantly and drive to the mill for a boat, in which it would not be difficult to bring the two to the bank. Meantime the miller and red-haired Vaska (as he was commonly called) moved forwards, singing at the top of their voices; sometimes they kept together, and again they separated, when one wished to take to the right, the other to the left; their voices were clearly audible. All the servants, joined by a constant stream of boys and girls from the village, were keenly interested, talking loudly, laughing, and disputing. Some said that they would suffer no worse mishap than a cold bath which would sober them effectually; that the water was shallow everywhere except for one hole near the kitchen where it was neck-deep; and that the men were good swimmers. Others declared that it was all very well to talk like that on dry land; but the river was deep in many places, as much as eight feet in the old channel; even sober men might sink in wet clothes, and drunken men would go to the bottom like a key. The spectators forgot that though their voices could be heard, their

words could not be distinguished; and they all began to gesticulate violently and call out directions: 'More to the left!'—'More to the right!'—'This way!'—'That way!'—'Not that way!'—and so on. The two men, who had sunk waist-deep in the water more than once and even deeper occasionally, seemed really to have been sobered: they stopped singing and calling out, and walked straight ahead in silence. Suddenly they changed their direction and took to the left, where there was a submerged ditch, only distinguishable by the rapidity of the current; it was called the new ditch, and was, at that time, deep. The spectators raised a loud cry which the unfortunate men must have heard; but they paid no attention to it, and perhaps took it for a sign of approval. On getting close to the ditch, they stopped and said something; from their gestures it was clear that Vassili wished to change their direction. A dead silence followed, as if all were trying to hear what they were saying. On they came, below the ditch, fortunately, but along the very edge of it. At this moment, the young miller, Boltunyonok's son, galloped up in the cart; and, when the boat was carried to the bank and lowered into the water, he pulled with the oars, and punted himself over the far bank of the river into the old channel. Just as he got there, his father disappeared beneath the water. A terrible cry rose beside me and was hushed at once. It was clear that the miller had stumbled and fallen into the ditch; but all expected to see him come to the surface; the ditch was narrow, and it was possible to reach the bank in a moment; but there was no sign of him. Horror seized on all: many crossed

themselves; others said in a low voice, 'He is lost, he is drowned;' the women began to weep and wail. We were taken off to the house. I was so frightened and stupefied by what I had witnessed that I could give no account of it to my mother and aunts when they asked me what had happened. Yevséitch and Parasha were not there: as soon as they had deposited us in the room, they ran back to the river. There was not one single servant left in the whole house. My mother and my aunts knew this much, that some drunken men were walking over the fields to the ford; so when I at last got out the words I had heard from others—'The old miller is lost and drowned,' then the full extent of the calamity became clear to them. My aunts went out themselves, to learn the details and to send some one to attend to us. Soon Grusha, grandmother's deaf maid, hurried in with Parasha, and told us that the body could not be found, a number of men with poles had managed to cross the old channel, but if they found anything now, it could only be a corpse, as he must be dead long ago. 'It is very sad', Parasha added, 'to look at his children and his ailing wife; but no man can escape his destiny.'

So our bright Easter day was clouded over. All were depressed; and as to myself, it is hard to describe my state of mind. I had often read, and heard still more often, that people do constantly die; I knew that death was the end of all men, and that soldiers fall by thousands in battle; I had a lively recollection of grandfather's death, which had taken place close beside me, in another room of the same house. Yet, for all this, the death of the miller, who under my

very eyes had walked and sung and talked and then instantly disappeared for ever, produced on my mind a different and much more powerful impression ; and to be drowned in a ditch seemed to me much more terrible than to perish in a shipwreck—I was familiar with them from books—and sink in the bottomless depths of a boundless ocean I was seized with a blind fear that something similar might happen at any moment to my father or mother or all of us.

By degrees the servants came back, all bringing the same report, that the body had not been found. The hour of dinner, which is usually earlier on the first day after the fast, had long gone by. At last the table was laid and dinner served. My father was summoned, and he came in, much depressed and upset ; since his childhood he had known the old miller and was very fond of him. Our dinner was a gloomy meal, and my father went out again as soon as we rose from table. The search for the body went on till evening. At last, when the searchers were about to go home, weary, wet through, and hungry—for they had not had time to break their fast properly—a shout from the young Boltunyonok made them all turn round. ' Found ! ' he cried. The son's pole had caught hold of his drowned father's coat ; and aided by others, he dragged out the body by a great effort. It appeared that the drowning man, drawn below by the swift current, had got under the bare roots of an old alder, which grew, not by the new ditch, but on the bank of the old deep channel, where it curved round the island. As soon as the news of this discovery reached us, the house was again deserted

for a time: all the household hastened to view the body, and then returned with such horrid particulars that I hardly slept all that night as I pictured the old miller to myself. I trembled all over and broke out in a cold sweat. But I had the firmness to overcome my horror, and did not wake my parents. Night with its suffering passed away, dawn appeared, and my morbid fancies sank to rest at sunrise. I went to sleep in peace.

The weather now changed, and the rest of Easter week was wet and cold. So much rain came down, that the floods, when thus reinforced, rose again, and remained at their former level for twenty-four hours, after which they fell rapidly. At the same time, as often happens in April, the summer warmth set in. Within a week of St. Thomas's Sunday¹ began that marvellous season, not always clement at its opening, at which Nature awakens from sleep and begins to live a full, young, rapid life; the season of universal movement and excitement, of sound and colour and fragrance. I was too young then to understand it and appreciate it in detail; but I felt new life in myself and became a part of Nature. Not till I had grown to maturity and recalled this time, did I consciously appreciate all its enchanting spell and poetic beauty. But I then recognized what I had before dimly guessed at, when I greeted spring in our house at Ufa, in our poor little garden, and in the muddy streets. At Sergéyevka, our arrival had been too late: I saw there only the end of spring, when Nature had reached her full development and full splendour, and the constant change and forward movement had stopped.

¹ 'Low Sunday' in the English Church calendar.

The sad death of the old miller soon passed from my mind, crushed down and crowded out by new and powerful impressions. My heart and mind were full ; some mysterious business seemed to weigh on me and make me anxious ; I felt a mysterious desire to go somewhere. And yet, in reality, I went nowhere and did nothing ; I neither read nor wrote. It was impossible to read and write, when the birch buds were bursting and the fragrant bird-cherries breaking into blossom—when the crinkled leaflets, as they opened, threw a veil of whitish down over the black gooseberry bushes—when the larks hung all day right over the court-yard, pouring out a stream of unvarying song till it died away in the sky, a song which caught at my heart and affected me to tears—when all the slopes were covered with crocuses, purple and blue and white and yellow, and the funnel-shaped grass-blades and close-sheathed flower-buds stole everywhere out of the ground—when ladybirds and beetles of every kind came out into the kindly light, and white and yellow butterflies began to flash past, and bees and bumble-bees to buzz—when there was movement in the water, noise on the earth, and the very air trembled—when the sunbeams quivered, as they made their way through the moist atmosphere filled with the elements of life. How much business I had, how many anxieties ! Twice every day I had to visit the wood and make sure that the jackdaws were sitting on their nests ; I had to listen to their incessant cawing ; I had to watch the lilac-leaves opening to let out the plum-coloured clusters of the coming blossom—the finches and warblers establishing themselves

in the gooseberry bushes and barberries—the ant-heaps waking to life and movement, where first a few ants showed themselves and then multitudes poured forth and began their labours—the swallows flashing past and diving into their old nests under the eaves—the clucking hen brooding over her tiny chickens, while the kite made circles and floated above them. Oh, I had business enough and cares enough! I ceased to run about the court-yard; I did not roll eggs on the ground, or swing with my sister, or play with Soorka. I walked, or more often I stood still; I seemed depressed and uneasy; I walked and looked and, for a wonder, was silent. I was tanned like a gipsy by the sun and wind. My sister laughed at me; Yevsitch was astonished that I did not play in the proper way or ask leave to go to the mill, but was always walking and then standing stock-still. 'What can there be you have not seen there, my little falcon?' he used to ask. My mother, too, did not understand the state I was in, and used to look at me anxiously. I got more sympathy from my father: he often went with me to the garden, to look at the birds in the bushes, and explained to me that they were beginning to build their nests. Or we went to the Jackdaw Wood, where he was very angry with the jackdaws for killing the tops of the birches by breaking off twigs to make their clumsy nests; he even threatened to destroy them. How charmed he was when he saw the lungwort for the first time! He showed me how to twitch off the purple flowers and suck the sweet white stalks. He was even more delighted when he heard in the distance, also for the first time, the song of the

mocking-bird. 'There, Seryozha,' he said to me, 'all the birds will start singing now: the mocking-bird is the first to begin. And presently, when the bushes are in leaf, our nightingales will begin too, and then life will be still more cheerful at Bagrovo.'

That time also came at last: the grass grew green, the trees and bushes put forth their leaves, and the nightingales began to sing. Night and day they sang, never ceasing. By day their song did not strike me as wonderful. I even said that the larks sang as well; but in the late evening or at night, when universal silence began to reign, under the light of the fading sunset-glow or the glitter of the stars, the song of the nightingales was an excitement and joy to me, and for a time prevented me from sleeping. There were a great number of the birds, and they evidently came close to the house at night. One corner of our bedroom ran out towards the bend of the river, close to the bushes swarming with nightingales, so that their calls and rapid cadences came loudly through the shuttered windows on two sides. My mother used to send out at night to frighten them away. I had never before believed my aunt when she said that her rest was disturbed by the nightingales. I don't know if my father's promise came true, that life would be more cheerful at Bagrovo; nor can I say whether I was at this time in what could be called high spirits; but this I know, that the thought of that time has been, throughout my whole life, a source of quiet happiness in my heart.

At length I became calmer. My eyes were satisfied with seeing, and I became used to the

sights or rather marvels of nature around me. Nature herself, having attained her full magnificence, seemed to grow calmer. I began to play games or read sometimes, or to sit and talk to my mother; and I was glad to see that this pleased her. 'Well, you seem to have regained your senses,' she said, kissing and stroking my head; 'but you were quite like a mad creature: you took no interest in anything, and forgot that you had a mother!' I could see tears in her eyes, and her reproach stabbed me to the heart. I was vaguely conscience-stricken before; but now scales seemed to fall from my eyes. Though I had not forgotten the existence of my mother, yet I had seldom thought of her, had never asked how she was, though her health was not strong, and had ceased to impart all my thoughts and feelings to her. I was overcome with remorse and penitence; I blamed myself mercilessly, begged forgiveness, and promised it should never happen again. I believed that I should love her henceforward more passionately than ever, that I had never before appreciated her truly, and that I was unworthy of a mother who had more than once saved my life at the risk of her own. I went so far as to believe that I was a bad ungrateful son, who deserved the contempt of all. Unfortunately, my mother sometimes either could not or would not check my tendency to run to extremes: it was a feature of her own character, and when my feelings ran in the same channel as her own, her enthusiastic temperament did more to increase my excitement than to allay it. This was often the case in later years, and it was so especially on the occasion I am describing. Influencing one

another, we worked ourselves up to violent expressions of mutual repentance and passionate affection; all difference of age and relations between us disappeared; we both wept hysterical tears and sobbed aloud, while I confessed that I did not love my mother enough, and she, that she had not done justice to so precious a son and had grieved him by her cruel reproaches. Just at this moment, my father came into the room. The first glance made him turn pale: he never flushed but always lost colour, when alarmed or excited. 'What is the matter with you?' he asked, with agitation in his voice. My mother said nothing, but I began at once to explain exactly. He looked at me with astonishment at first, and then with pity. When I stopped, he said, 'It is a strange pleasure you two find in tormenting yourselves about trifles and making yourselves ill. You are still a child; but your mother ought to know better.' His words fell on me like a bucket of cold water. But my mother took up the cudgels for our sensibility, and said much that was offensive and unfair to my kind father. How unfair. I did not, alas! understand till I was much older: at the time I was convinced that my mother was perfectly right, that my father had little feeling and was incapable of such love as she and I felt. In a few days, of course, my excitement had passed away, my conscience was at ease, and I was convinced that I was not a bad boy and a bad son. My heart was again open to the impressions of Nature; but for a long time I felt some risk in surrendering to them, and my passionate attachment to my mother grew steadily. Though still a child, I became her

friend and confidant ; and thus I heard much that I could not understand at all or misunderstood, and much that I ought not to have known.

Meanwhile, as soon as the floods disappeared and the river returned to its summer channel, and even before the water was thoroughly clear, every servant in or about the house began to fish. Every one who could hold a rod, even some of the old women, took to angling ; for the large fish, such as tench, took wonderfully just then, and the spring take lasted from the first flowering of the bird-cherry till the guelder-roses had fallen. You had only to run down for an hour in the early morning, and you would bring back at least two large fish, after losing at least as many more ; and everybody ate fish-soup, or boiled fish, or fish-pies. Yevséitch had been at it a long time ; he told me of his exploits, and usually added : ' Ah, it's not fishing for you yet, my little falcon : it is still wet and dirty everywhere. But in a fortnight the sun will warm the ground and dry it ; and, with a view to then, I'm getting lines ready for you.'

The time came, as Yevséitch had foretold, for me to fish too. Our warm weather, after lasting a few days, changed once more in the week of St. Thomas to damp and cold, though this did not prevent the growth of green leaf and blossom. The warmth set in again and became settled. The sun heated the earth, and dried up the mud and slime. Yevséitch had prepared me three lines of different sizes, but none so large as those used for big fish ; nor could I have managed one of that size. My father, who had not fished once, perhaps because my mother disapproved of it,

went with me to the mill-pond where the sluices were still up. Any one might angle in any part of the river; but the mill-pond was forbidden ground for the present. I saw the pleasure with which my father made his preparations. On our way to the mill, where he walked so fast that I could hardly keep up, he said to me :

‘ Well, Seryozha, there’s nothing to be done just now on the river. The lower dam has been carried away by the flood, and it will take some time to restore it; nor is there much fish by the garden now, but in our pond here the fish are all crowding towards the narrow outlet and are bound to take splendidly. Another day, you will throw a line for the first time in the Boogoorooslan. I suspect that after Sergéyevka you will think the fishing worse at Bagrovo.’

I declared that everything at Bagrovo was better. In the preceding summer, I never had a rod in my hand; and, although the presence of spring had affected me so powerfully, with its unfamiliar marvels—the arrival of the birds and the resurrection of all Nature—that I had almost forgotten about angling, yet now that my emotions were calmed and I was, so to speak, surfeited with excitements, I remembered my old passion for the sport and turned to it with fresh enthusiasm. The nearer we got to the pond, the greater became my impatience. But the appearance of the pond grieved and puzzled me. The wide expanse, ordinarily covered with water, now presented a bare, dirty, uneven bottom, consisting of slime and mud, which was cracked but not yet dried up by the sun; it was covered with a litter of stumps and snags; and posts, driven in to hold

traps the year before, stuck out here and there. Before, all this had been hidden by the bright smooth mirror of the water, framed in green banks and edged with green reeds. The young shoots were not yet noticeable, and the old beards of dried reeds which had not been cut down in autumn formed an unpleasing yellow patch between the green edges where the pond had overflowed, and, as they rattled in the wind, made a kind of lifeless sound that was still more unpleasing. I must add that there was a very bad smell, caused by the drying slime and the dead fish in the reeds. But the disappointment was soon forgotten. We chose the driest places we could find near the mill-race, and began to fish. My father proved quite right: we kept on catching perch and large roach and tench. Most of the big ones fell to my father, and some to Yevséitch, as they were using long lines with large baits; with my small line I invariably caught a roach, if Yevséitch baited my hook with bread, or a perch, if he used a worm for bait. I never saw my father so excited; and it came into my head to wonder why he did not angle every day. Yevséitch too, who was always excited by fishing, said himself that he was more frantic over it than he had ever been in his life; and this frenzy grew even greater, when my father pulled out a huge perch and a still huger tench, and Yevséitch himself first lost a big fish of some kind and then had his line broken by a pike. He looked so absurd, as he slapped his thighs and bewailed his bad luck, that my father laughed and made me laugh too, but soon another pike treated my father in the same way. I wanted to catch something bigger;

and though Yevséitch declared that I could not pull out a good-sized fish, I begged him to give me a longer line with a large bait. He did so, but no success followed. on the contrary, even the small fish ceased to take. I got tired of it and wanted to go home; my father and Yevséitch were not thinking of stopping, and, but for my presence, would have stayed by the pond till dinner-time. As he was wrapping up our tackle and preparing to go home, Yevséitch said: 'What would you think of coming here early, Alexyéi Stepanitch? What grand sport there would be then!' My father seemed rather vexed, and said that the morning was impossible for him. 'And you've never once taken out your gun, you who used to be so fond of it!' To this my father said nothing. I paid particular attention to what Yevséitch said, and also to the fact that my father was out of spirits during our way home.

The fish we had caught could hardly be got into two buckets. We carried them straight to grandmother and my aunt Tatyana; my aunt Alexandra had gone back to her own estate before this. They took a great interest in our catch: with cries of surprise they examined and praised the fish; both were fond of fish when cooked, and my aunt was an angler herself. But my mother refused, with an impatient gesture, to look at our booty, and said that it smelt of damp and decay; she even declared that we two smelt of the slime in the pond, and perhaps this was actually the case.

When alone with my mother, I asked her why my father did not fish, when he was so fond of fishing; and why he never took out a gun, though I knew from himself that he loved shooting.

My mother did not like these questions. She replied that nobody prevented him from doing both, if he chose; but at the same time she spoke with contempt of those sports, especially of fishing, which she called an occupation for idle and empty-headed people who had nothing better to do, and a pastime suitable only for children. I felt a little ashamed of my own passion for it. I was beginning to consider myself as beyond the childish age: my reading, my conversations with my mother on grown-up subjects, the phrases with which she fed my vanity—'you are no longer a child; you understand everything; what is your opinion about this?'—and similar expressions, in which, at moments of expansion, she treated me mistakenly as her equal in age—all this had made me conceited, and I was beginning to look down on others as my inferiors. My shame of my favourite pursuit, however, did not last long. On the third day, my desire grew so strong that, under the pretext of my youth, which, in other cases, I refused to acknowledge, I got my mother's leave to go again to the pond with my father. With Yevséitch alone, I would not have been allowed to go there. I had a very strong reason for not putting this off: I knew from my father that two days later the pond was to be refilled. Yevséitch and my father took measures to prevent the pike from biting off the hooks: they used casts of gut or wire, which the pike, for all their sharp teeth, could not bite through. The hopes and expectations of our party were not disappointed. We caught many fish, including six pike, of which four fell to my father and two to Yevséitch.

The closing of the dam (or rather, the result of this, for I was not allowed to see the process itself) was also a novel and interesting scene for me. As soon as the sluice was lowered and the current cut off by degrees, the river became quite shallow below the dam, and, except in the deep holes, the great Boogoorooslan shrank to a little rivulet. All along the stream, right down to the lower dam where the sluice was open, the banks were covered with people, young and old, armed with wicker hurdles and snares to put across the water. As soon as the fish perceived the fall of the water, they began to wriggle down-stream, stopping sometimes in the deepest places, and naturally fell into the snares spread for them. Yevséitch and I stood on the high bank which commanded a distant view up and down, and watched the animated scene, accompanied by the cries of the women and children. Sieves and petticoats knotted at one end were used as nets by the children; they even caught fish in their hands, sometimes pulling out fair-sized roach from under a snag or out of a crayfish's hole; eels also were taken, which like a crayfish's hole at any time to coil up in. The crayfish amused me by the way they stretched out their claws and crawled about the shallow bottom, from time to time they inflicted a sharp pinch on the bare arm or leg of some wader, and a loud shriek arose from some boy or girl, usually the latter.

The Boogoorooslan, though not broad, was very rapid and deep and full of holes. Towards evening the pond was getting full, and at night the water was running into the mill-race; early next morning the mill was working, and our river ran once

more with its former depth and volume. I was vexed at not seeing the sluices lowered, and my father's description increased my vexation and aggravated my grievance. I did not fail to demand an explanation of my mother, why she had not let me go ; her answer was that I had no business to go among a crowd of peasants, and to hear, for no purpose, their rough talk and coarse jokes and abuse of one another. In vain my father declared that there had not been, and never was, anything of the kind ; and that there was no rough language, though plenty of fun and noise. I was bound to believe my mother, though I wished to take my father's account for truth.

As soon as the land was dry, field-labour began with the sowing of the spring wheat, and my father drove every day to the ploughland. Every day I asked to go too, but only once did I get leave from my mother. At my urgent entreaty, my father agreed to take his gun with him, as there was plenty of game in the fields ; but, as my mother said she was afraid the gun would go off and kill me, my father left it at home, though he assured her that he would not have loaded it till we got off the car. I noticed that he wished himself to take the gun ; and I wished it very keenly and therefore went off in a depressed frame of mind. But the sight of the spring landscape soon caught my attention ; joy made an end of my grief and mastered my heart. Going uphill from the stack-yard, I saw that all the hollows were thickly covered with bright green grass ; and the shoots of the almond-trees, which trailed along the slopes of the steep hillocks, were loaded with small pink flowers which sent out a strong

sweet smell. On the hills cherry-trees and wild acacias were in flower. Above us the larks poured out their song; from time to time the note of the crane came to us, the snipe drummed at a distance; the hoarse cry of hawks was heard; bustards rose from the road and settled down on it again. More than once my father said, 'A pity we have not the gun with us!' The fields had a bird-population of their own, quite unlike that which peopled the waters and marshes down below; and this seemed to me even more beautiful than that. On the high ground I felt for the first time the immeasurable difference of the air on the hills and in the plain, and perceived the justice of my mother's complaints against the low situation of Bagrovo. There, the smell of stagnant water and heavy damp was constant; here, the air was sweet and dry and light. Black strips of ploughed land soon came in sight; and, when we got near, I saw a labourer, a man past middle life, walking at a vigorous and measured pace backwards and forwards over the field, and scattering seed, which *he took from a bast wallet hanging across his shoulder*. Some distance behind him three labourers were ploughing; the horses which drew the ploughs, though they looked small and weak, went steadily on, and, without any violent effort, broke up the black soil with the coulters and parted the friable earth to right and left. The land was not virgin soil, but what we called 'pulp', having been ploughed several times before. Behind the ploughs came three harrows with iron teeth; the horses which drew them were like those in the ploughs, and were driven by boys. Though it was still early and there was a spring

freshness in the air, all the labourers were in their shirt-sleeves. As I watched the regular and unceasing movements of men and horses, I forgot the beauty of the spring morning. The important and even sacred nature of their task, though I was too young to understand or appreciate it fully, made a strong impression on my mind. My father walked up to a place where the land had been ploughed but not yet harrowed, made some measurement with his stick, and began to calculate. I looked round and saw the same scene, the same regular movement of men and horses backward and forward going on in other places; and it made me reflect very deeply, though I did not quite know what was the subject of my reflections. My father now came back, and finding that I had never stirred, he said 'Well Seryozha?' I replied with a volley of questions about the men and boys at work in the field and got from him full and satisfactory answers. His words sank deep into my heart. I compared myself with these boys, who lived on bread and water, and spent the whole day, from sunrise to sunset, in tramping backwards and forwards over the rough plough as if it were so much sand, and the comparison made me feel sorry and ashamed, and I resolved to ask my parents to put me to harrowing. Full of these thoughts, I went home and began to impart to my mother my feelings and my wish to work. When she laughed, I grew excited; at last she said, in a dignified way:

'Put this nonsense out of your head; ploughing and harrowing are not your business. However, if you wish to try it, I give you leave.'

Not long after I was really allowed to try my

hand at harrowing. But it turned out that I was no good at it : I could not walk on the ploughed land, nor hold the reins and guide the horse, nor force it to obey ; the village boy who walked by my side laughed at me. I felt shame and vexation, and never spoke of trying farm-work again.

At this precise period of my life at Bagrovo, I spent little of my time with my sister, and kept at a distance, as it were, from her, though this did not in the least mean that I loved her less. The temporary separation was due partly to my new amusements, in which she, as a girl, could not share, and partly to my closer relations with my mother. When talking to me as to a friend, my mother always sent my sister out of the room, and forbade me to repeat to her our frank conversations. She loved her daughter less warmly than her son and took less notice of her. I was the favourite—the name was often applied to me—and, consequently, a spoilt child. A spoilt child I long remained ; but that never prevented a warm affection between me and my brothers and sisters. My grandmother and aunt loved my sister and were not very well-disposed towards me ; they were always suggesting to her that she was an unloved daughter ; that my mother, at a look from me, would do anything I wanted ; and that the son was everything and the daughter nothing. But all these harmful insinuations produced no effect on the loving heart of my sister ; and no feeling of envy or discontent ever darkened for a moment the bright goodness of her fine character.

As before, my mother refused to take over the management of the household. Full control

remained with my grandmother, or rather my aunt. All my mother would do was to order meals for herself and for us; but nevertheless it was clear that she was the real mistress of the house, and that all was done, or would be done if she chose, according to her will and pleasure. Young as I was, I understood that my mother was not loved by the household, and that all, except Yevséitch and Parasha, feared her, although she never said a rough word to any one. This was a riddle, which I was still too young to solve.

When the roads were dry, all our neighbours, who were mostly relations, came to visit us. The Chichagoffs also came, but did not bring Mme Myortvavo; of course my mother was very glad to see them and spent much of her time in lively and intimate conversation with Mme Chichagoff; from their *tête-à-têtes* even I was excluded. Twice I caught a snatch of what she was saying, and made out that she was complaining of her position, and felt dissatisfied with her life at Bagrovo; and this thought was a constant cause of wonder and distress to me.

Peter Chichagoff, like my mother, knew nothing and cared nothing about the management of a house and estate. All that he left to his wife and her mother; his own pursuits were reading, writing, painting, plan-drawing, and shooting. Knowing that we had plenty of game, he brought his gun and a dog, and went shooting every day in our marshes, which contained a great number of woodcocks, snipe of all kinds, marsh partridges, and landrails. My father went with him once, and brought home full game-bags. M. Chichagoff always bantering my father.

'Alexyéi Stepanitch,' he said, 'does not like to waste powder and shot; he likes his bird rather large and rather near; snipe are not much to his taste; a duck is more in his line; there's more meat on it'

My father parried the joke by admitting that, for want of practice, he was not a good shot at small birds; Chuchagoff had certainly killed four couple of snipe, but on the other hand he had sown the marshes with shot, apparently hoping for a crop of it next year. Chuchagoff laughed heartily with the ringing laugh peculiar to him, of which my mother used to say that you could see his intelligence even in his laughter. Sometimes he gave up a little of his time to conversation with me. This was generally after the day's shooting, when he had changed into dry clothes and was sitting on the drawing-room sofa, smoking his large meerschaum pipe. 'Well, Seryozha,' he would begin, 'how are our old friends, Sumarokoff, Cheraskoff, and especially Lomonossoff? How does Karamzin get along, and the brotherhood of modern bards?' By this, he meant that I was to start reciting such poetry of those authors as I had by heart. He himself made jokes at the expense of all of them, even Lomonossoff, for whom he had much respect all the same. Derzhavin he praised warmly, and yet made fun of him; Dmitrieff was the only poet whom he praised without qualification, but without enthusiasm; unfortunately, I hardly knew anything of either of these. He was much amused by my style of reciting, or, as he called it, my declamation. I had never heard any one recite poetry except my uncles; and my uncle Alexander had a passion for imitating the tragic

actors of the Moscow theatres, so that I had formed my own style by trying to reproduce his imitation. It may easily be believed that my performance, accompanied as it was by misplaced emphasis and uncouth gestures, was really amusing. None the less I recall with sincere satisfaction and gratitude the hours of my childhood which I passed with Peter Chichagoff. He was a man of exceptional intellectual gifts, and towered above the society in which he lived. His clever witticisms became fixed in my mind, young as I was, and probably served to prepare me for a juster estimate of contemporary writers.

In later years, when I was at college and afterwards in the public service at Petersburg, whenever I came home for a holiday, I never failed to see Chichagoff as soon as possible. I read to him anything new in the way of literature, and I shared with him my impressions and youthful views and convictions. His judgement was often sound and always pointedly expressed. With special clearness I remember how, not long before his death and when he was very ill, I repeated to him some verses on Derzhavin and Karamzin.¹ Forgetting his illness and frequent attacks of pain, Chichagoff laughed heartily over the verses and repeated some of the lines and phrases. 'Well, my friend,' he said afterwards, and his face looked bright and animated as he spoke, 'you have done me so much good, that I shan't need my dose of morphia this time.' (In his fits of pain, which were beyond mortal powers of endurance, he used to take small doses of morphia.)

¹ These verses, quoted in the original, I have not translated.

women and girls constantly stooping as they pulled out the weeds; when they had gathered a whole bundle on the left arm, they carried it carefully to the side of the field, threw down their load, and went back to their weeding. The work is fairly heavy, and tiresome too, because the good result of the labour is not obvious. At last the season came for haymaking, which began a week before St Peter's Day¹ I had not seen this form of field-labour before; and when I saw it. I thought it the pleasantest sight of any.

On a fine summer day, long after the sun's rays had dispelled the morning freshness, I drove with my father to what we called 'The Sacred² Wood'; it consisted chiefly of young limes, of fair size by this time, and straight as pine trees. It had been formally protected from the axe some years before, and was very strictly guarded against thieves. As we rose from the sunken road to this wood, I began to catch low noises unfamiliar to me—a regular swishing noise repeated at very short intervals, and also a rasping metallic sound. 'What is that?' I asked at once. 'You will soon see,' said my father, smiling. Our view was blocked by a thick undergrowth of young aspen; but when we turned the corner, a wonderful spectacle lay before me. Forty labourers were mowing, strung out in one long line; the scythes, as they came up, flashed in the sun, and the cut grass lay in thick regular swathes behind them. At the end of a long strip, the mowers stopped and

¹ June 29.

² To preserve a wood from illicit cutting, the priest and people walk round it in solemn procession with banners and ikons, and a date is fixed, before which it may not be entered.

began to sharpen their scythes in some way, bandying jests meantime, as could be guessed from their loud laughter; their words were still indistinguishable. The metallic sound was caused by the sharpening of the scythes against wooden hones, smeared with clay and sand; of this I was told later. When we got close, my father hailed them with the time-honoured phrase, 'God speed the work!'—and their loud reply, 'Many thanks to you, *batyushka* Alexyéi Stepanitch,' filled the field and echoed in the sunken road. Then they set to work again. How easy and graceful were their movements, how broad and free was the sweep of their scythes! About this work there was something so kindly and cheerful, that I found it hard to believe what I was told, that it was very laborious. The air was light, and a wonderful fragrance came from the wood, and from the grass which had been mown in the early morning; it was full of flowers, which had begun to fade in the sun's fierce heat and to send forth a peculiar pleasant smell. The uncut grass stood up like a wall, waist high; and the men said, 'What a hay crop! It's a regular bear.'¹ Crows and jackdaws, flying across from the wood where they had their nests, were strutting along the high green ridges of cut grass; and I was told they were picking up beetles and caterpillars, which, now that they had lost their thick cover, could be seen running about on the prostrate stalks and bare ground. I went close and convinced myself by my own eyesight

¹ I could never explain to my satisfaction this phrase, which was applied also to a tall thick crop of uncut corn. I suppose that by the word 'bear' they meant to denote strength, i. e. the substance, height, and goodness generally of the grass or corn. (*Author's Note.*)

that this was quite true ; and I also noticed that the birds were pecking berries as well. There were wild strawberries in the grass, still green but very large ; in exposed places they were already ripening. My father and I picked each a large handful of the berries, where the grass was cut ; and some of them were larger than a hazel nut ; many of them, though not red yet, were already soft and sweet.

I enjoyed the hayfield so much that I was unwilling to start off home at my father's summons. In the wood there was a dell with a little babbling stream ; and from there we heard the cooing of wood-pigeons or turtles, and also the sound of caterwauling, and the melancholy cry of the oriole ; the sounds were so distinct and so unlike one another, that I could scarcely believe that they were all produced by the same pretty little yellow bird.¹ From time to time the piercing trumpet-like note of the woodpecker was heard. Suddenly a hawk flew out over the field, soared high into the sky, and circled over our heads, keeping a watch for the small birds which the mowers kept startling out of the grass. When they appeared, he fell on them, like lightning from the clouds. Admiration for his rapid and graceful movements was tempered by keen sympathy for his victims ; and the labourers greeted with loud cries both the attacks of the bold robber and the escape of the small birds, every time one succeeded in dropping down on the grass or hiding in the wood. Yevséitch was more excited than any-one, and followed with shouts of applause the marvellous speed of this beautiful and fierce bird

¹ The oriole.

of prey. For a long time we watched the hawk, as he dashed at his prey and missed it ; but at last he struck a bird and carried it off to the wood in his talons. ' Ah, the poor thing is caught ; he has struck it and carried it off to his nest, to feed his young ones : ' such were the cries of the mowers, interrupted and sometimes drowned by the rasping of the scythes against the bones and the rustle of the grass as it fell in swathes. My father repeated that it was time for us to go, and we started. All the way, the pleasant picture of the hayfield stuck in my head ; but when we got home, this time I did not rush to my mother, to tell her of my new impressions. Experience had taught me that she did not enjoy descriptions of farm work, of which she knew nothing except by hearsay ; if she had ever seen it, it was only in passing or from a distance. I hastened to describe it all, first to my sister, next to Parasha, and then to my grandmother and aunt. These two had watched hay-cutting and the hay-harvest many a time, and, as a matter of course, knew much more than I did about the whole business ; what puzzled them was my enthusiasm. My aunt added, however, ' It's all very pleasant to look on at, but mowing in this heat is terribly heavy work ; ' and her words made me thoughtful.

My sister, though she could not take part in some of my summer amusements, was my faithful companion and helper in collecting grasses and flowers, in watching the nests of the small birds which bred freely in the old gooseberry-bushes and barberries, and in collecting caterpillars, butterflies, and beetles of different kinds. My inborn taste for pursuits and observations of this kind,

and for natural history in general, was brought out by the volumes of *Reading for Children*. When we noticed the nest of any small bird—it was generally a linnet or a redstart—we came every day to see the hen sitting on her eggs; sometimes, for want of care, we frightened her off the nest; and then, carefully parting the prickly branches, we looked at the pretty little coloured eggs lying in the nest. It happened sometimes that the bird resented our curiosity and deserted her nest. If we saw that the little bird was absent from the nest for some days, and did not flutter round us chirping as usual, then we took the eggs, or perhaps the whole nest, and carried them home, considering ourselves the lawful owners of the dwelling deserted by the mother. But when the bird succeeded, in spite of our interference, in hatching her eggs, and we found unexpectedly in their place the naked little fledglings constantly opening wide mouths and cheeping pitifully—when we saw the mother flying to the nest and feeding them with flies and caterpillars—what words can describe our joy! We continued to observe the young birds as they grew and got feathers and at last abandoned the nest.

The grasses and flowers which we picked we pressed and dried in books, using by preference Rollin's *Roman History* and Buchan's *Domestic Medicine*; and, to prevent the pages from being discoloured or injured by damp, we placed each flower between sheets of writing-paper. The phosphorescent light of glow-worms was a great attraction to us—about phosphorus I knew already from *Reading for Children*—we caught them and kept them in paper boxes, supplying them with

grasses and flowers of different kinds ; and we applied the same treatment to all caterpillars which had sixteen legs. The glow-worms did not live long, and almost always had lost by the next day their power to display at times their fascinating light, which we liked to watch in a dark room. The other caterpillars lived a long time, and sometimes, to our great joy, turned into chrysalises. The process took place in the following way The smooth caterpillars, by means of a sticky substance, hung themselves up, or rather gummed themselves, to the top or side of the box ; and the hairy caterpillars rolled themselves up in leaves and wound round themselves thin white transparent threads, on which they rested as on a bed. After a period which differed much in different cases, the outer skin of the caterpillar peeled off like a shell, and a chrysalis was left, either hanging or lying down. The former kind had projections and horns, and were grey with patterns on them, or flesh-coloured, or sometimes gold-coloured ; the latter were always dark in colour, and looked just like tiny dolls, closely swaddled in cradles. I knew that the hanging chrysalises ought to turn into butterflies, and the others into moths ; but, as I did not know then how to manage them, the development of our chrysalises was arrested ; and this was inevitable, because we were constantly looking at them and even feeling them, to see if they were alive. Only one came out, a gold-coloured chrysalis which I had found under some projecting boards ; it developed into the commonest sort of butterfly, a cabbage white ; but our delight was of no common kind !

The wild strawberries ripened at last, and were

brought to the house—no mere cupfuls and basketfuls now, but whole bucketfuls. Grandmother often sat on the veranda to receive the fruit from the pickers; she seldom praised the berries, and generally grumbled and scolded. My mother was very fond of them, and believed them to be good for her: she took them as medicine several times a day and ate little ordinary food at that season; and we children were allowed to eat as many as we liked. Besides all the other ways in which the fruit was used, a drink was made out of it which had an incomparable taste.

On hot summer days, long ropes, propped at intervals on forked poles, were stretched over all the court-yard, from the outdoor storehouses to the underground cellar and from the stables to the workshop. On these ropes clothes of all kinds were hung out to dry, or to keep them from moth—men's garments and women's garments, fur coats, woollen dresses, warm quilts, and stuffs of all sorts. It was a great amusement to me to examine them. Many of the garments were such as people had ceased to wear, and were made of stuff which it was no longer possible to buy; so I was told. One day I was strolling between these hanging walls or screens, where motley colours and even gold and silver embroidery were swinging in the wind, when I came without thinking to my aunt's storehouse. It stood opposite the windows of her room, and almost in the middle of the court. Her maid, Matrona, a stout girl with a red-and-white complexion, had been stationed at the door as sentry; but she was sound asleep, although the hot sun was shining directly on her face. Hanging on props round her, or lying on the ground by the door,

were a great number of pieces of cloth, broad and narrow, and a quantity of table-linen, furs, silk materials, dresses, and so on. I looked attentively at them all, and noticed that some of the linen was yellow with age. Curiosity made me go inside the storehouse. There I saw trunks standing open and empty, and bags hanging from the ceiling; and on two rows of shelves which ran along the walls there was a vast store of miscellaneous articles—glass and china ware, teapots and teacups, milk-jugs, lacquered trays, small boxes and drawers, and even bottles with new corks; in one corner lay an immense feather-bed, or rather a great sack full of down; in another there was a large new tub covered with a white cloth, I was inquisitive enough to raise the cloth and was astonished to find that the tub was nearly full of lump sugar. Just then I heard the voices of Parasha and my sister, who were walking between the hanging garments, looking for me and calling out my name. I hastened to meet them; but, as I ran out, I awakened Matrona. She was horribly frightened, when she saw me running out of the storehouse. ‘What were you doing in there, sir?’ she cried angrily; ‘that is not your place at all. Now your aunt will be angry with me: she never allows a living soul to enter her storehouse.’ I said that I did not know that; but I would tell my aunt at once and ask her leave to examine it all thoroughly. But my words increased Matrona’s alarm: she rushed forward, kissed my hands, and begged me not to tell my aunt where I had been. Overcome by her appeals and entreaties, I promised to hold my tongue; but suddenly I saw Parasha standing close beside me, and holding my sister’s

hand, with a sly look on her face. She had heard everything, and when we got a little distance from the storehouse, asked what I had seen there : and I naturally told her, very precisely and minutely. She heard me with impatience, and when I came to the lump sugar, she flared up and began :

‘ What wonder that we servants hide away an odd piece of stuff at times, or carry off a lump of sugar, when real ladies, with long pedigrees too, act like that ? I assure you that she scraped together all that you saw in her storehouse by robbing her father, while her mother winked at it. It’s a regular ant’s nest, and she’s collected it all as a marriage portion for herself. That sugar—for twenty years past she’s been stealing and hoarding it ! She has whole bags of tea and coffee hanging in there, I would swear ’

But suddenly Parasha recollected herself : exactly as Matrona had done a few minutes before, she began to kiss my face and hands and beg me *not to repeat to my mother what she had said of my aunt*. She reminded me how she had incurred my mother’s wrath already for speaking in a similar way about my aunts. She cried and said, ‘ I shall certainly be banished to Old Bagrovo, and, likely enough, be parted from my husband, if Sofya Nikolayevna hears what I said in my folly. The devil tempted me,’ she went on, wiping away her tears ; ‘ it was too much for me ; I was so sorry for you. I had heard long ago of these doings, but I did not believe it ; and now you have seen with your own eyes. Oh ! I am utterly undone ! ’ she shrieked, bursting out again in floods of tears. I assured her that I would say nothing to my

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mother; but Parasha could not rest till she had made me swear that I would not speak a word. She kissed my sister and said, 'She's my good girl; she won't say a word against her poor old Nana;' and my sister kissed her without speaking. I swore, as she wished; it was the first time in my life I had ever used the name of God in that way, though I had often heard others using it freely enough. I wonder now, that Parasha was able to induce me to take an oath, a thing which my mother severely condemned.

My intention not to get Parasha into trouble was carried out. I remembered very well, how the year before I had nearly brought misfortune upon her, and how sorry I had been afterwards; but to keep the whole thing secret was impossible. I told my mother at once, what I had seen in my aunt's storehouse, and how frightened Matrona was, and how she begged me not to tell my aunt. All I kept back was Parasha's outburst. At first my mother smiled, but afterwards said severely:

'You are to blame, for going where you have no business to go without permission; and, as punishment for your fault, you must conceal the truth from your aunt. Otherwise, if she knows that you were in her storehouse, she will beat Matrona.'

The word 'beat' took me aback: I could not believe that my aunt, who was sorry to crush a midge, was capable of beating Matrona. I would certainly have asked my mother to explain; but my uneasy conscience told me that I was concealing the truth already, by keeping back from my mother what Parasha had let out to me. I felt rather uncomfortable all day; I did not even go near my aunt; nor did I spend much time with my

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mother, but went about with my sister or read a book. But by evening I had invented the following excuse for my conduct : if my mother herself told me that, in order to save Matrona from a beating, I must conceal from my aunt my visit to her store-house, then I was also bound, in order to save Parasha from banishment to Old Bagrovo, to conceal her outburst from my mother. This reasoning quite consoled me, and I went to bed in good spirits

The summer was hot and thundery. Rain fell almost daily, accompanied by lightning and peals of thunder which made the whole house shake. At such times, grandmother lit candles before the ikons and said prayers ; but my aunt, who was frightened of the thunder, buried herself in her large feather-bed and down cushions. I was not a little frightened ; for, though I had often read that one ought not to fear thunder, how could you help being frightened of what might kill you ? I was constantly hearing rumours of disasters caused by it. The storms soon passed over, and then the air became so fresh and good, and I so light-hearted, that I felt an almost insane happiness and disturbed other people by my noisy mirth ; but when they asked the reason of my conduct, I could not explain it, because I did not understand it myself.

These constant short showers were followed by an unusually large crop of mushrooms. A report that mushrooms were growing in the Sacred Wood—the ground was paved with them, said our old bee-man who lived in the wood with his bees—excited my aunt and my father, who were very fond of picking mushrooms, and especially the kind called *groozdi*. They settled to start for the wood

that very day after dinner, accompanied by all the maids and a number of the outdoor women. It vexed me very much that during the whole of dinner my mother kept scoffing at the pleasure of picking mushrooms, and laughing especially at my father, because, for the sake of this expedition, he had put off till next day some necessary business. I thought that nothing would induce her to let me go; so, only by way of experiment, I said in a hesitating way, 'Will you not allow me too, mamma, to go and pick mushrooms?' To my surprise, she at once agreed, but said to me in a voice full of meaning, 'I make one condition, that you keep close to your father in the wood, or else, once they get occupied with their mushrooms, they will lose you.' Pleased by this unexpected indulgence, I replied that I would not leave my father for a single minute. My father was rather disconcerted; and I even thought that he blushed. Our preparations were begun in haste, as soon as dinner was over. Two long cars and a cart were already standing at the front steps. All the party provided themselves with baskets of every shape and size, some of bast, others of wicker. As many as could find room took their places in the vehicles; and some had walked on ahead. My mother and grandmother sat on the veranda to see us off, and we started in complete silence, which continued as long as we were in the court-yard. But the moment we got out of it, lively conversation began in all the vehicles, and was soon succeeded by loud chattering and laughter; and when we had got a verst away from the house, the women and girls began to sing, and my aunt actually joined in! Everybody was unusually gay and lively, and my own

spirits rose high. I had not heard much singing, and the delight it gave me then is fresh in my memory to this day. Red-cheeked Matrona, who had a wonderful voice, led the singing. After the incident in my aunt's storehouse, she had become convinced of my discretion, which she rewarded by showering caresses on me on every suitable occasion and calling me 'clever boy' and 'kind young gentleman'. When we drove up to the wood. I ran to Matrona, praised her beautiful voice, and asked why she never sang in the maids' room at home. She bent down and whispered in my ear, 'Your mother does not like to hear our country songs'; then she gave me a kiss and hurried off into the wood; and I was very sorry to lose her, because the songs and her voice had made a strong impression on me. Soon the whole party were scattered through the wood, and lost to view. The wood seemed to be alive: on all sides rose cheerful cries and halloos, ringing laughter and snatches of song; Matrona sang louder and better than any one, and for a long time I could distinguish her voice, as it got more and more distant. Yevséitch, my aunt, and my father (from whose side I never stirred) walked through the young wood keeping pretty close together. My aunt was the first to find a clump of mushrooms. Coming out into a little clearing, she stopped and said, 'There are bound to be mushrooms here: I positively smell them!' and a moment later she called out: 'I déclaire, I stepped on them.' My father and I walked towards her, but she would not let us come near: 'they were her mushrooms, and she had found them, and we might find out another clump for ourselves.' I watched her go down on her knees

and feel the earth under the bracken leaves ; then she pulled out the mushrooms and put them in her basket. Before long, my father and I came upon a nest of them ; like my aunt, we set to work, first feeling for them and then carefully taking them out from under their wrapping of last year's leaves, overgrown with grass and woodland flowers. My father worked away with a sportsman's ardour, and especially admired the baby mushrooms. 'Look, Seryozha,' he said, 'how charming the button-mushrooms are ; pick them carefully—they are brittle. Look ! they have a sort of down underneath ; and what a scent !' And I really thought the baby mushrooms very pretty ; and they had a pungent smell. After strolling about the wood for two hours, we had filled our baskets entirely with young *groozdi*. We then walked back to the place where we had left the horses ; and Yevséitch gave a loud hail : 'Time to go home ! All come back to the horses !' A few voices answered his hail. It was some time before we found our vehicles ; and the search would have lasted still longer, had we not heard from a distance the snorting of the horses. Tightly tethered to oak saplings, our good horses were suffering horrid torments from the attacks of blood-sucking insects ; the worst of all these is the *stroká*, because it chooses for its bite places on the animal which are not protected by hair. The poor beasts, bitten till they bled, were constantly shaking their heads and manes, swishing their tails, pawing the ground, and twitching their whole bodies, in the attempt to drive away their tormentors. The man who drove the cart had been left on purpose to protect the horses with a long leafy bough which had been

cut for him ; but we found him sleeping peacefully in the shade of a tree. My father scolded him ; and Yevséitch threatened he would tell our old coachman, Trophim, who would not let the offender off in a hurry. Many of the maids soon joined us, with baskets full of *groozdi* ; but some seemed to have gone far afield, and we started home without waiting for them. Matrona being one of those who had returned, I begged that she might come in our car. She found a place on the back seat with her basket, and sang some more songs as we drove, to which I listened with great satisfaction. We got back just in time for tea. Grandmother was sitting on the veranda, and we laid out before her our own baskets and the big baskets of Yevséitch and Matrona, full of *groozdi*. She was fond of mushrooms in general, and especially fond of this kind : she liked them fried in sour cream, boiled in brine, and, best of all, preserved with salt. She spent a long time in sorting them, taking a childish pleasure in dividing them into three heaps according to their size. Grandmother had strange tastes : she liked her boiled eggs stale, and her mushrooms old and maggoty ; and now, finding some yellow and decayed *groozdi* in Matrona's basket, she sent them at once to the kitchen to be fried for her.

I ran to my mother's bedroom, where she was sitting with my sister and little brother, busy in cutting out some underclothing for us. I told her all about our expedition—that I had kept close to my father, that I had enjoyed the singing and Matrona's voice, and that all the party had been merry ; but I did not say a word of what Matrona had whispered to me. I kept this dark, without

any previous consideration : a voice seemed to whisper to me to hold my tongue. But afterwards I pondered long over what I had done, at first with grief and remorse ; but then I became easier in mind, and even assured myself that I had acted as I should have done, and that Matrona's words would have vexed my mother. I was quite aware that, even as it was, my mother was not pleased by my account ; and, strangely enough, some instinct had warned me of this beforehand. All that evening and the next day, my mother was sadder than usual, and I felt myself guilty in some way which I could not understand. I was sad and uneasy. Forgetting, or rather abandoning, my own pursuits and amusements, I spent more time with her and was more demonstrative than usual. She noticed the change, and, without entering upon any explanations, was gentle and tender with me beyond her wont. When I thought that she was more at ease and more cheerful even, I went back with eager zest to my fishing-lines and hawks and pigeons. And so time went on till the very day of our departure.

I had long known, that in the beginning of August we were to visit Praskovya Ivanovna at Choorassovo. She was determined that my mother should see in its full perfection the splendid garden of seventeen acres at Choorassovo, which contained an immense number of apple-trees of the rarest sorts, cherry-trees, pear-trees, and even bergamots. My father did not at all want to leave Bagrovo at the very busiest season. It was barely a week after the beginning of the rye-harvest ; and it was also time to sow the rye, which was always done at Bagrovo about the 25th of July. He saw

CHAPTER XVIII

A SUMMER VISIT TO CHOORASSOVO

THREE years exactly had passed since my last experience of a long journey in summer. At the age of eight, three years mean a great deal ; and it might have been expected that I would now appreciate far more keenly and more consciously the beauties of the picturesque and varied country through which we had to travel. But, in fact, it did not turn out quite so. Three years before, on the journey from Ufa to Bagrovo, from the town to the country, I was like an escaped prisoner. At every step, I came face to face with novelties and natural objects which I had never seen before ; and Bagrovo itself, to judge by my father's descriptions, seemed to my fancy a region of enchantment, like the fabulous 'Islands of the Blest' which Vasco da Gama discovered on his voyage, as I had learnt in *Reading for Children*. But now I was leaving Bagrovo, which I had learnt to love passionately ; I was leaving all my favourite pursuits, and was going reluctantly to Choorassovo, to live in the same two rooms which we had occupied before, and to face the same eternal visitors, in a house which, though splendid, was not our own. The garden, with its apples which I was not even allowed to eat, had no attraction for me ; no fishing, no hawking, no pigeons, no freedom to go where I liked and say what I pleased ! And, above all, I knew that my mother would pay less attention to me and talk

to me less than at Bagrovo. For she was sure to be busy—sitting in the drawing-room or the balcony, or walking in the garden with our hostess and her visitors, or receiving visitors in her own room. The very word ‘visitors’ began to have a hateful sound for me. With my head full of these thoughts, I sat in sadness beside my sister, squeezed up in one corner of our carriage. My father was sad too: like me, he was sorry to leave Bagrovo, and still more sorry to part from his mother, whom he dearly loved, and who, as all noticed, had declined very much of late. But my mother was glad to leave Bagrovo: she did not like it and always said that all her illnesses were due to its low and damp situation. After a longish silence, my mother turned to me and asked: ‘Why do you hide in that corner, Seryozha, never speaking, nor looking out of the window?’ I replied that I was sorry to leave Bagrovo, and gave full expression to my feelings. My mother tried to convince me that Choorassovo was a much nicer place than Bagrovo. The air there was dry and healthy; instead of a stagnant pond, there were a number of splendid springs, spouting out of a hill and running over pebbles. The garden at Choorassovo was so large, that one could not see it all in three days; and it contained several thousand apple-trees covered with red ripe apples; there were hot-houses, peaches, and pears, as well as abundance of sweet-smelling flowers. Finally, there were many books there, which I had not yet read. All this she said with eager warmth, and it was all true besides, and I had not a word to say against her glowing description; but, though my reason

agree; and when she said, 'Well, is it not true that it will be much nicer at Choorassovo?' I answered instantly that I liked Bagrovo better and was happier there. My mother smiled and said, 'You are still young and have never seen any place but Bagrovo; wait till you have seen Choorassovo in summer, and you will tell a different story.' I said that I would never change my mind. She was rather vexed, and said, 'You have little sense yet.' This depressed me still more; and under the influence of these thoughts and feelings our journey was continued.

Though I had made the journey to Choorassovo once before, yet the district through which we now passed was totally strange to me. The former journey had taken place in winter, when nothing was visible or noticeable under the snow; and also our summer route was, to some extent, different, and kept more to the steppes. We spent the first night near a Tartar village, called Vaitoogan, on the bank of the Sok, a large river and full of fish. As a matter of course, we had four rods and lines tied under the carriage; and my father, Yevséitch, and I found time to fish, and caught a number of fine perch, which did something to relieve all three of us from our depressed state of mind. On the second or third day—I am not quite sure which—we came in the morning to a large hamlet where the land was tilled by discharged soldiers; it was called 'Fair Settlement', and lay on the bank of the Kondoorcha, a smaller river than the Sok, but just as pretty and deep and full of fish. We turned off the road, and made a halt close to a bridge. I have a special recollection of this halt, because we all, for some reason, found it so

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pleasant. My father and I, submitting to our fate, had ceased to mourn for Bagrovo. My mother, who had undoubtedly found our long faces rather trying, was much pleased by this change, and did her best to improve our spirits. She actually proposed that we should go and fish at the mill, which was so close that the splash of the water falling from the mill-wheels, and even the creaking of the stones, filled our ears and forced us to raise our voices. Before we had time to unharness the horses, boys from the settlement ran up, bringing us a quantity of large crayfish, which bred freely in smallish lakes near the river. My father and I welcomed them, not only as a dainty dish but for another reason: we used them for bait, and not in vain. My father and Yevséitch, using the crayfish tails for bait, caught in a very short time a number of large fish, especially perch, which took without stopping, in a deep hole under the sluice, near the weir and the mill-race. To my great grief, I was too young to take part in this: with my small tackle I pulled out small fish in a safe shallow place, sitting on the mill-dam. When we went back in good spirits with our rich spoil, my little sister ran to meet us with a shout of joy, carrying a basinful of ripe blackberries, which she (or rather Parasha) had picked on the bushes that fringed the picturesque course of the stream. My mother felt well and was in unusually good spirits, even gay. Our table, consisting of boards propped on two logs, was laid in the shade of the carriage; seats were brought from the mill; and I thought that there could not be in the whole world a better and more cheerful meal than ours was that day. When my

mother was well and cheerful. she had the gift of spreading cheerfulness around her; this I had noticed before; and over this dinner I entirely forgot the parting from Bagrovo and became reconciled to the prospect of Choorassovo. I was convinced that my father felt as I did; for his face, as it seemed to me, became much brighter; even my sister, who was a little afraid of my mother, chattered away as playfully for once as she often did when we two were alone.

We arrived at Vishenki early next day. In winter I had seen nothing of it; but summer now revealed it as a most dull and tiresome place. The little stream Berlya had run dry in many places; at the village it was dammed up by a dike of manure, or there would not have been a drop of water left in summer. The pond was not at all pretty: it was covered with a kind of scum, and its banks had disappeared under mountains of manure, surmounted by straggling rows of peasants' huts. The shaft of a well rose up here and there, but the water in these was cloudy and tasted of malt, so that drinking-water had to be fetched from a small spring at some distance. There was hardly a green bush, let alone a tree, for the eye to rest on; and the country was quite flat. A single pair of large willows grew in a low cabbage-patch. Yet the village was thought to be very prosperous; and this was amply proved by the abundance of old corn in the stack-yards, the large herds and flocks, and equally large droves of excellent horses. These we saw for ourselves at sunset, when the animals belonging to the proprietor and those of the peasants were driven home. A terrible cloud of dust hung

long over the village, and the evening silence was broken for long by the lowing of cattle and bleating of sheep. My father told me that the larger half of the stock were left out in the fields all night. He spoke with great enthusiasm of the fertility of the soil: the black mould was in some places seven feet deep. In the evening, when talking to the village headman, my father said:

'You are well off in other ways, but you've no water. It was a mistake of my uncle, Mihaila Maximitch, not to place the village three versts lower down; there's plenty of water in the river there, and you would have had a mill close to you.'

The headman bowed and explained that there had been no mistake:

'It all came about from our own folly, *batyushka* Alexyéi Stepanitch. Though I was only a little boy when we were brought here from our old place, yet I remember that there was plenty of water, not only in the village, but five versts higher up, where the river begins; and all along the river there were trees. But our fathers, and we after them, cut down all the trees, and the cattle trampled down the springs, and now the water is dried up. Bear Hollow, for instance—what a wood there was there! But it's all gone, nothing but young sprouts—not fit even to make shafts for a cart. We suffer for it now: we heat the houses with straw, and for torches and farm repairs we have to buy wood.'

My father was much vexed to hear this: he gave orders that Bear Hollow should be strictly preserved; he would inform Praskovya Ivanovna of this at once, and promised that she should send special orders to this effect.

The rooms which we occupied here were all in readiness for a visit from the agent, just as they had been the year before. Just as before, the knight frowned under his visor in the picture hanging on the wall of our sleeping-room. The other picture was there too—bunches of purple grapes in a basket, a slice of red melon with black seeds on a dish, and juicy apples on a plate. But in myself I noticed a change: the pictures, which I had liked so much at our first visit, pleased me less now.

After dinner, my father drove to inspect the crops. The rye had all been cut here, as the grain ripens a fortnight earlier than at Bagrovo. On the other hand, here they were only beginning to sow the proprietor's rye, though at Bagrovo this work was finished. The harvest of the spring-sown wheat and spelt had been going on here for a week. The fields were a long way from the village, and my mother would not let me go; nor, indeed, was my father willing to take me, as he feared I should be over-tired.

Next day we made a not very early start and halted by the ferry over the Cheremshan, a fine but narrowish stream, at the village of Nikolskoë, which belonged to a gentleman called Doorassoff. We did not cross the river; we pitched our camp on the sandy bank, untied our rods, procured worms for bait, and were proceeding to fish in a place where, according to the boys angling near the ferry-boat, the fish took splendidly and even sterlets were caught. We had hardly begun, when a very smart footman appeared, bearing a request from M Doorassoff that we would do him the honour to dine with him, and intimating that a carriage would be sent for us immediately.

Doorassoff was a well-known millionaire, who kept a splendid establishment and prided himself on his hospitality; he had made our acquaintance the year before in Praskovya Ivanovna's house at Choorassovo. My parents thought it would be rude to refuse, and accepted the invitation. But to me this was a terrible blow and altogether unexpected. I had a faint hope that my sister and I would be left behind; but my mother said she was afraid of the river, so deep and so near she feared I would run to the bank and fall into the water. As my sister was not likely to go to the river, she was left behind; but I was told to put on my best clothes and join the party. A smart carriage with four horses soon drove up, with an outrider and two footmen. My father and I were not long in changing our clothes; my mother made the little hut where the ferrymen lived into a dressing-room, and took some time over her toilet; she came out smarter than I had seen her for a long time. How pretty she was, and how everything she wore became her! I ran over in my memory all the ladies I knew, and once more decided that in the whole world there was no one prettier than my mother.

The village consisted of a large open space, two sides of which were covered with rows of peasants' houses, while in the centre there rose a church built of stone in what was then the latest fashion in architecture. The manor house, built of stone and two-storied, was connected by open colonnades with the wings, and formed one side of a square court with round towers at the corners. The various offices served as it were as walls to the court; a spacious old garden, with ponds and

a stream running through it, bordered it on one side ; and the main front of the house overlooked the river Cheremshan. Never having seen anything of this kind, I was much impressed, and at once applied to the scene before me the descriptions, which I had read in books and which still lingered in my memory, of feudal castles or country palaces of English lords. My curiosity was awakened, my imagination became busy, and I began to look at everything with an expectation of something out of the common. We drove into a large quadrangle, with a marble fountain and a sundial in the middle, and laid out in fine large flower-beds and gravel paths. A grand portico adorned with lanterns, vases, and statues, and a still grander staircase, with carpeted steps and hot-house shrubs and flowers in pots placed at intervals—these surpassed my expectations ; and my fancy flew from the palace of an English nobleman to the enchanted castle of Scheherazade. In the morning-room we were met by the owner of the house, who was no longer young, rather short, and quite unpretentious to look at. After the usual greetings, he offered an arm to my mother and led her to the drawing-room. The mahogany furniture adorned with bronze and covered with velvet or tapestry—some marvellous clocks on pedestals, one in the body of a lion, another in the head of a man—the pictures in gilt frames—everything was so expensive and luxurious that the splendour of Choorassovo might be called poverty when compared with such a palace as this. In the course of his preliminary inquiries, our hospitable entertainer discovered that my sister had been left at our halting-place, and pro-

posed to send a carriage to fetch her. My mother would not hear of it at first, but was obliged to yield to his persistent entreaties. Meantime Doorassoff proposed that we should look at his garden and hot-houses. It was not difficult to discover that our host was fond of showing off his house and garden and whole establishment, and eager to sing their praises; he said plainly that everything about his place was immeasurably superior to what other people had.

'Yes, and I've pigs too, the like of which have never been seen here; I imported them from England, and they came all the way in a caravan. Now they have a house to themselves. Would you like to see it? It is not far from here. I visit them twice a day.'

My parents agreed, and off we went. We actually found a pretty little house at the far end of the garden; in the front room lived a swine-herd and his wife, and two other large rooms were inhabited by two monster pigs, each as large as a moderate-sized cow. Our host stroked them and called them by pet names. He especially directed our attention to their ears, and said: 'Do look at their ears; they're just like stove shutters.' When we had admired the pigs, which I thought alarming rather than agreeable, we went through the conservatories and hot-houses, which contained a great quantity of rare flowers and plants, grapes and fruit. Our host made haste to tell us that the flowers were only a second display, the first having been removed already. While we were in the houses, Parasha brought in my sister, who saw us at some distance and ran to meet us, while Parasha hastily withdrew.

Doorassoff picked fruit and flowers indiscriminately and handed us so much that we had no place to put it. He made much of my sister, who was surprisingly at her ease and attractive; he called her a beauty and his little wife. This brought back to my mind my quarrel with Volkoff in by-gone days; and though I reflected with some pride that I, who was a foolish child then, understood now that a girl of seven could not marry a man of forty, yet the word 'wife' still sounded unpleasantly in my ears. We had just returned to the drawing-room and sat down to rest after a great deal of walking, when a man came in, richly dressed and looking very like our Governor at Ufa, and announced that dinner was on the table. At once I whispered to my mother, 'Who is that?' and she managed to whisper back that he was the groom of the chambers. This was no answer to my question, as I had never heard this title before, and was completely puzzled by it. Doorassoff gave one arm to my mother, while with the other hand he led my sister. Passing through several rooms, one richer than another, we entered a dining-room, very large and splendid, and so high that there was a second row of windows above the first. The round table of moderate size was luxuriously decorated: in the centre stood a beautiful tree, bearing flowers and fruit; and my eyes were dazzled by the cut glass and gold and silver plate. Our host made my sister sit beside him and ordered an embroidered cushion to be brought for her. He praised the fish-soup before it appeared, saying that in all Russia there were no better sterlets than in his river. The soup had hardly been handed round, when the inner

wall of the room began to move and rose up, and the sound of music smote on my ears! I saw before me a raised platform, on which sat a number of men holding in their hands instruments unknown to me. The only instruments I had ever heard were the fiddle, on which my uncle used to make some attempts, the *balaláika*¹ on which the servants played, and the bagpipe of the Mordvinians. My astonishment was crushing, overpowering. Holding my spoon in my hand, I remained petrified, gazing with open mouth and staring eyes at this group of men, i. e. the orchestra, all busily pulling and pushing at their instruments or blowing into them, and producing enchanting magical sounds, which seemed now to die away and now to rise into the howling of a tempest or even the roar of thunder. Our host was much amused at the sight of my bewilderment: he laughed loudly and reminded me that the soup would cool; but my thoughts were not of eating. My mother did not approve of my confusion, or rather stupefaction. she whispered to me to stop looking at the musicians and go on eating. But it was hard for me to obey her to the letter. Dipping my spoon in the soup, I constantly glanced aside at the orchestra, and each time dropped the soup on my lap. Doorassoff laughed still louder, and my father smiled; but my mother reddened and was vexed. At first my sister was as much surprised as I, but she recovered at once and went on with her dinner, and laughed when she looked at me. I ate a little of the wonderful soup and gave up my plate nearly full. The music stopped,

¹ A popular instrument with two or three strings, played with the fingers.

and all praised the skill of the performers. I was beginning to set to work in earnest on some dish which I had never seen before, when two young ladies, in pretty white dresses, with bare arms and necks and in ringlets, appeared on the platform. Holding sheets of paper in their hands, they advanced to the very edge of the platform, made a low curtsy, and began to sing. I acknowledged their curtsy by a bow; but my politeness only made Doorassoff laugh and my mother blush once more. But I was not carried away by the singing: the words were unintelligible to me, and the tunes still more so. I thought of the singing of our maids, and decided that Matrona sang much better. After this decision, I gave my attention to eating and got through dinner without again attracting the attention of my host. We marched back to the drawing-room, Doorassoff again giving his arm to my mother. After coffee, Doorassoff proposed that we should go out in a boat on the river, taking horns with us, and assured us that his horn-blowers were incomparable; but my parents declined this treat, on the ground that they absolutely must cross the Volga early next morning. Doorassoff ceased to press them, took a most affectionate farewell, kissed my sister, and escorted us to the carriage, which we found loaded with flowers and fruit and two immense packets of sweets.

On getting back we quickly changed our clothes and resumed our journey. Nearly all the way to our halt for the night, I went on asking questions of my parents, and especially my mother, about all I had seen and heard during the day. Answers led to fresh questions, explanations called for fresh

explanations, till at last I exhausted my mother's patience, and she told me to ask her no more questions about Nikolskoë. I turned to my father and continued the subject in a low voice, taking the opportunity to communicate to him my own observations and suggestions. But some of my problems met with no solution at all, for instance : ' Why did the water from the fountain flow upwards ? ' ' How is a sundial made, and how does it show the time ? ' ' What is the platform for, on which the musicians sat ? ' When I asked who the pretty young ladies were who sang, my father told me that they were servants and serfs of Doorassoff's, who had been taught singing at Moscow. But what they sang, and in what language—that neither my father nor my mother could tell me. When our host came under discussion, my mother took part in our conversation. She said that he was a kind man, not clever or well-educated, but ambitious, who had seen the extravagant luxurious life of millionaires in Moscow and Petersburg and wished to copy it. Not being able to organize things himself, he had hired certain skilled Germans and Frenchmen to help him ; but finding that this did not answer, he had discovered a gentleman, some said a prince, who had run through a fortune, whose business it was to put the whole establishment on a princely footing. Doorassoff was very rich, and grudged no expenditure on his fancies ; several times a year he gave entertainments at which all the county assembled. My mother scolded me for behaving so absurdly when I heard the music : ' You were just like a little beggar-boy,' she said, ' who has never seen anything beyond the walls of his own hut, and

then is suddenly introduced into a gentleman's house.' I replied that I was astonished, just because I had never in my life seen anything of the kind. 'One should not show one's astonishment,' she said. 'Why not?' I asked. 'Because it was absurd, and I was ashamed on your account,' she answered. A new objection in the shape of a question was in my mind and came to the tip of my tongue; but I saw that my mother would be angry, and suppressed it. At the same moment we drove up to our halting-place for the night, the village of Fair Bank, twelve versts from Simbirsk and ten from the ferry over the Volga. To have a calm crossing, we were bound to be at the ferry by sunrise, as the wind blew hard every day as soon as the sun grew strong.

Awaking early next morning, I saw that the horses had been taken out of our carriage, which was standing on a sloping sandy bank. It was very cool, and even inside the carriage there was that peculiar feeling of fresh dampness which one only finds on the sandy banks of great rivers—quite unlike the dampness from ponds and marshes, which always has an unpleasant smell. The Volga lay before me, and I looked with horror at the rapid current and the two versts of water, across which we had to make our way. We were dressed warmly and made to sit on a boat that lay there bottom upwards. The traces of retreating waves had left a kind of pattern on the banks; and it was possible to see how high they came when lashed by a storm. Above the water-mark was a smooth bed of coarse sand and small pebbles. Flocks of seagulls flew screaming over the water, sometimes dropping into it and diving in pursuit

of a fish. Simbirsk with its churches and the stone mansion of the Governor, standing on a high hill thickly covered with flourishing gardens, afforded a noble view ; but I paid small attention to it. Round us was a scene of great noise and wild confusion. A crowd of people had spent the night by the ferry ; and already one huge ferry-boat, closely packed with horses and carts with front wheels raised and shafts sticking up, could be seen as a black mass in the middle of the Volga, while a second was loading in haste, to take advantage of the favourable hour. A number of ferrymen came from Chassovnya, a village on the bank, and offered us their services. They had a kind of headman, who warned my father not to trust them indiscriminately, as many of them were not ferrymen at all, but to rely entirely upon him. The second ferry-boat was now loaded to the utmost possible limit, and the men cast loose the ropes, pushed out from the landing-place, and poled their way slowly up-stream, keeping near the side. A third ferry-boat was then brought up ; and on this, which we were assured was better and more substantial than the others, our carriage and covered cart and all our nine horses were placed. Our good horses, unaccustomed to such crossings, began to snort and foam ; it was impossible to tether them to the carriage or the railing that lined two sides of the boat ; so our coachman and other servants held the heads of each pair, leaving only Yevséitch and Parasha with us. No intruder was allowed on board ; and soon our ferry-boat got under way and was punted slowly up-stream. 'Push her higher up, my men,' the headman shouted from the bank ; 'then hard and straight across !' I

surveyed the scene anxiously : I was alarmed to see that the easterly breeze, hardly noticeable at first, had risen ; that the surface of the Volga was continually changing colour, now light and now dark ; and that vast strips of its muddy water were ruffled into great furrows by the wind. A large rowing-boat was quickly brought round, and six men sat down on the thwarts, while the headman himself stood by the steering-oar. We were caught up and carried across to this light craft, and set down on benches in the centre of it. We pushed off, and the boat moved slowly over the water. We went up-stream at first ; but when we had gone about 200 yards, the skipper shouted out : ' Hats off ! Pray God to help us ! ' The boat stopped for a moment ; all the crew took off their hats and crossed themselves. ' Now, my lads,' said the skipper, ' row your hardest across and God be with you ! ' Then he pressed both hands and the whole weight of his body on the handle of the heavy steering-oar, till it came right down in the stern and brought the blade to the surface, when he shifted the oar to the other side and turned the nose of the boat across the stream. The rowers pulled with a will, and we went along fast. Fear had mastered me before this ; yet I struggled against it and concealed it as far as I could. But now, when the bank began to recede from my sight, when we got into the current, and when an appalling volume of water, eddying and flowing on with irresistible power, caught hold of us on all sides and carried our boat along like a shaving—then I could hold out no longer : I screamed out, began to cry, and hid my face on my mother's breast. My sister saw me and followed

my example. My father laughed and called me a little coward ; but my mother, who had no fear of the water, even in a storm, was angry and tried to prove to me that there was not the smallest cause for fear. When I had lain for some time with closed eyes, I got ashamed of myself and uncovered my eyes enough to see with joy that Simbirsk on the hill was coming nearer us. My sister had recovered already and was chattering gaily. My fear began to pass off ; and when we got near the bank, my spirits rose, as they always did with me after a fright. We disembarked and sat down on some thick logs, of which there were many lying on the steep bank. The ferry-boat with our carriage was still afloat in the middle of the river ; the dipping oars looked from a distance like a child's toy, and made no visible progress towards us. The wind rose higher, and the carriage caught the force of it ; all declared that the ferry-boat would be carried a long way down. On the bank near us there was a row of little shops, where they sold buns, ginger-bread, *kvass*,¹ and quantities of apples. My mother, who was very fond of apples, went herself to buy some, but finding that those offered her were not quite ripe, said they were all 'garbage'. She managed, however, to get a dozen that were ripe ; and choosing a very sweet one, she cut it in two, removed the core, and gave half to me and half to my sister. I had seldom tasted raw fruit, and I found the apple very good. While we were waiting for the ferry-boat, my father, who was very fond of fish, went out in a fishing-boat to the tanks and brought back a bunch of live sterlets tied to a string, out of which he

¹ A drink made of malt and rye.

intended to have soup made at Simbirsk. I did not even think of asking leave to go with him: I should not have got it, and I was frightened myself of the little boat. But I looked with great satisfaction at the fish: I had never before been able to see them alive, and I was allowed at last to hold them in my hands. The bells of a church close by now rang out for service, and this sound, which I had not heard for a long time, and took little notice of somehow at Ufa, caught my ear and made a very pleasant impression on my mind. At last the ferry-boat with our carriage and horses came to land, after drifting down some distance; the vehicles were taken off and the horses put in harness; my father paid for the passage, and we started to walk to the hill. The hill of Simbirsk is high and steep, and the ascent was such a tough job in those days that even in dry weather it was considered still more laborious than the passage of the Volga; but in muddy weather it offered such obstacles to a heavy vehicle that immense exertions were required to overcome it: it was quite an exploit, and by no means free from danger. Our weather, fortunately, was dry. We walked up to the first curve of the ascent, where the carriage overtook us; in order to halt on the slope and let the horses breathe, it was necessary to put the brake on both wheels and to place stones or logs which we had with us under them: otherwise the carriage would have rolled downhill. Then we all walked on to the next turning, and again managed to stop the carriage there. My mother was too tired to walk farther; so she got inside with my sister and me, while the rest of the party walked on. Our strong powerful horses were all in a

lather and panted so hard that it distressed me to look at them. In this way, stopping repeatedly at each convenient point, we got safely to the top of this prodigious ascent. At Simbirsk we stopped at a house belonging to Praskovya Ivanovna, which she never used herself. The house was a fine house according to the ideas of those days, well furnished and full of pictures, for which her late husband, Mihaila Maximitch, had evidently a great fancy. Had I not seen Nikolskoë, this house would have seemed to me rich and luxurious; but after such a palace this seemed unworthy of notice. My parents saw no one at Simbirsk: they only waited to feed the horses and to eat the sterlet soup. I thought the soup better than Doorassoff's; I hardly ate any at his house—and did not even notice the taste; I had other things to think of then! At two o'clock we started from Simbirsk and reached Choorassovo about noon next day.

Praskovya Ivanovna had been expecting us for some time and was overjoyed to see us. She was especially loving to my mother and said:

'But for you, I know that Alexyéi would never have stirred from Bagrovo at the busy season; and I warrant that his mother tried to keep you. Well, now I will show you my garden in all its beauty. The apples are just ripe, and some are still ripening. They are a very fine crop, as if on purpose for you. I shall see now whether you like them.'

My mother embraced her kind hostess with sincere pleasure, and said that she would never have left Choorassovo, if it had depended on her. Alexandra Kovrigin welcomed us also and at once

sent information of our arrival to the Minitskys. At present there were no visitors, but a number were expected. Then our hostess, giving us no time to rest and recover ourselves after the journey, led us straight to the garden, which was really splendid. There were an immense number of apple-trees laden with apples of every possible sort, both ripe and ripening; the colours of the fruit were brilliant, and the trees bent under their weight. Many branches were propped, and some were fastened to the trunk of the tree; without these precautions the abundance of fruit would have broken them. All along the slope of a hill there were active springs which poured down the steep places in natural waterfalls with bubbles and foam, and then became pretty transparent streamlets, which freshened the air and gave life to the scene. Praskovya Ivanovna was an indefatigable walker: on she went till dinner-time, leading us now to a favourite spring, now to a favourite apple-tree; and she carried a long forked stick, with which she hooked down the best ripe apples for us to eat. My mother was really very fond of apples and ate so many that at last our hostess ceased to press more upon her. 'Well,' she said, 'I suppose you would spoil your dinner.' Twice over, the old butler, Ivanushka, came to report that dinner would get cold. We had to go back to the house, before we had seen half the garden. We went straight to the dining-room and took our places. This was the first time that my sister and I were allowed to sit at table with the grown-up people at Choorassovo. Henceforward this was the regular custom, to the great satisfaction of my mother. Praskovya Ivanovna was so cheerful and

talkative, so simple and direct in her speech, her smile was so good-natured and her glance at us so kindly, that I liked her at once much better than before. She seemed to me quite a different woman, as if I saw her for the first time. As before, we occupied the sitting-room and the nursery which had once been a bedroom; but now we were not confined constantly to our own rooms but could at times walk and run all over the house; this freedom was probably due to the absence of visitors, but it went on even in their presence. The Minitskys, whom no one counted as visitors, came from their estate of Podlyessnaya, and greeted my parents with sincere affection. This day was spent like the previous day: till dinner-time, we all examined the remaining half of the garden, and also the hot-houses and conservatories; but for these Praskovya Ivanovna had no great fancy. She liked everything that grew naturally in the open air, and cared much less for what was artificial and required a great deal of trouble. The hot-houses she only put up with, and she would not have done that, if she had not found them there already. To me the chief attraction about the garden was the springs, in which I found, among other pebbles, a number of what are called 'Devil's Fingers' of unusual size. I made such a collection of them that it took more than one window-sill to display them. Soon, however, I grew weary of this amusement, and even more weary of the orchard. I began to think with sorrow of Bagrovo, where the perch would be taking splendidly and the falconers bringing back every day a fine bag of quails. I found most satisfaction in the books, which I was allowed to read with greater freedom

than before. At this time I read several novels, for instance, *The Vicar of Wakefield*,¹ and *Herbert ; or ' Riches, Farewell ! '* The mystery of *The Iron Mask* pleased me most of all, and the interest was increased by the author's statement that his story was not an invention but the account of a real incident.

My father paid a visit to Old Bagrovo, and also travelled to Simbirsk and Lukoyanoff, to attend to his law business. He remained there much longer than he intended, and much vexed my mother by doing so

Meanwhile, visitors began again to come to Choorassovo, and the routine of the year before was resumed. This time I had more opportunities of watching it at close quarters : my sister and I now dined regularly with the visitors and were present much oftener in the drawing-room and hall. Card-playing was generally going on in the drawing-room, and the players were elderly people who were taken up by their game and did not talk much. But the hall was the regular haunt of the young people who did not play cards ; there was always more noise and gaiety in this room, and sometimes there was singing. Some of the songs were Russian ; and I still remember some stanzas of a song by Prince Khovansky, which Praskovya Ivanovna was fond of singing herself ; each stanza ended with the refrain—

' All thy friends are far away ! '

The verses—printed, I think, in *The Muses*—were very poor ; and yet not only as sung, when the

¹ Goldsmith's novel was published in 1766 : the boy, of course, read it in Russian, the only language he knew.

tune and voice of the singer cover the deficiency of the words, but as read, they produced on me a strong and affecting impression. I learnt them by heart and used to repeat them with much fervour on my part and applause from my hearers. Praskovya Ivanovna, when my mother told her of this, was delighted by my fancy for her favourite song and made me repeat it in the presence of visitors in the hall. She praised my performance warmly; and from that time I began to enjoy her special favour.

The men and maid servants at Choorassovo aroused my mother's fears as much as ever or even more, and from the first she took measures to preserve me from harm. I was strictly forbidden to speak to any of them, or to listen to their talk, or to watch their free and easy behaviour to one another; and Yevséitch and Parasha had orders to keep us at a distance from the servants. But the fulfilment of such orders is not easy, and it is never possible to rely upon it. One cannot keep ears and eyes closed; and when one has heard or seen something new and exciting, one wants to hear or see the continuation of it. The strict prohibition was itself a spur to curiosity; and unintentionally I noticed much that I had no business to hear or see. Fearing that some unpleasantness might follow, as it had before in the case of Parasha, and fearing still more a scolding from my mother, I did not tell her everything, excusing myself on the ground that she herself had encouraged me not to tell my aunt Tatyana of my visit to her private storehouse. Children have surprising memories, and it often happens that a careless word, spoken in their presence,

encourages them to do things which they would never have done without it.

I had always preferred the company of grown-up people to that of other children; but, for some reason, this did not content me at Choorassovo. As I sat in the hall and listened attentively to what people said and what excited their loud laughter, it puzzled me that they should find it amusing to talk of such trifles. No one had power to arouse my sympathy; and all the anecdotes about the neighbours, which must have been very laughable because every one laughed at them, seemed to me neither interesting nor amusing. I even tried sitting in the drawing-room beside the card-players, but I soon wearied of this too; for I did not understand the game or the terms used or the disputes between the players, which were sometimes lively enough. Two of Praskovya Ivanovna's favourite visitors were Alexander Karamzin and his brother-in-law, Nikita Philosoffoff. Karamzin was commonly called a Hercules; and, in fact, it is seldom possible to meet with a man of such powerful and athletic build. He was tall, with uncommonly broad shoulders, rather stout and at the same time very well made; his chest stuck out in front of him 'like a wheel', to use the Russian phrase. He was excitable and gay: he would sometimes exhibit his herculean strength, by playing with weights of eighty pounds as if they were light balls. Once in an excess of high spirits he caught hold of Darya Vassilyevna, who was tall and stout, and went through the military exercise, using her as a rifle. The despairing shriek of the old woman, whose kerchief and cap tumbled off while her grey hair fell in disorder over her shoulders, made all the

card-players jump up, and a general shout of laughter rang through the house ; but I was sorry for poor Darya Vassilyevna, though at the same time I could not help thinking what a splendid knight Karamzin would have made, with a barred helmet on his head and armed with spear and shield. Philosoffoff was a short man, but very lively and active. They used to say of him that his tongue was a razor ; he never stopped joking, and I often heard the phrase applied to him, that he would make a dead man laugh. But I repeat that I found little interest in all this ; and I sought more and more the company of my little sister, which I had rather avoided at first. The time passed pleasantly with her, because the two Minitsky girls, who were great friends of hers, were constant visitors at Choorassovo. The elder of the two was just my age and quite as fond of reading as I was. She brought with her a manuscript book of poems by Prince Ivan Dolgoruky. She much admired his poetry and preferred it to all the verses which she heard from me. I took up the cudgels for my poets, whom I was familiar with and knew almost by heart, and we had some very warm debates. She would not take my view, and I, in order to punish her for insulting my favourite writers, took to abusing Prince Dolgoruky, although, to tell the truth, I admired his poetry very much ; indeed, without her knowledge, I learnt his best poems by heart. We sometimes went so far as to quarrel, but not for long ; and by way of making it up, we used to repeat together a piece by the same author called ' The Contention '. The subject was a comparison between the sun and moon. I poured forth an enthusiastic panegyric on the sun, while

she repeated one line again and again, which came as a refrain at the end of nearly every stanza—

‘ Quite true, but I prefer the Moon ’

The last four lines of the poem were a sufficient proof of the amiability of the author, and they were recited by me—

‘ Contend no more ! Be wise in time,
And learn, O foolish man,
That words which flow from lips we love
Prove more than logic can ’

The result of our recitation was the following scene. My unwearied efforts to propagate my literary creed at last induced my fair antagonist to make some concessions ; and she used Dolgoruky’s own line in his defence, declaiming in her clear voice with total indifference to the metre—

‘ Quite true ; but Dolgoruky I prefer.’

The long absence of my father, which my mother so much resented, caused Praskovya Ivanovna to send to his assistance her head agent, Mihailushka, who was considered at that time the most skilful manager of a lawsuit in the Government of Simbirsk ; he was the best pupil of our blind friend, Pantelyei Grigoritch. Without saying a word to my mother, Praskovya Ivanovna wrote to my father, bidding him return at once. He complied with her instructions and came back at once to Choorassovo, leaving Mihailushka to take his place. My mother rejoiced, but her joy was diminished when she learnt that he had returned in obedience to his aunt ; and I heard some rather heated discussion between them on this point. A few days later my father said to Praskovya Ivanovna in my presence : ‘ Well, aunt, I have done what you

wished ; but, if I am not present to watch over my case, I lose it ; that 's all.' But she replied that he was talking nonsense, and that Mihailushka was much more competent in the matter. So he stayed, but very reluctantly. His prophecy was fulfilled : a fortnight later Mihailushka came home and reported that the decision was given in favour of the Bogdanoffs. My father was in despair. But Mihailushka assured him that it was of no importance, that the final decision must rest with the Senate—this was what Pantelyéi Grigoritch also had said—and that to spend money in the inferior courts would have been useless expense ; for, if we had won, the other side would have appealed and carried the case to the Senate, as we must do now. All this had no effect on my father ; but he was obliged to hold his tongue, because both my mother and Praskovya Ivanovna took Mihailushka's view of the case. It was settled that Pantelyéi Grigoritch at Bagrovo should draw up a petition to the Senate ; and for this purpose, Mihailushka was to take steps to procure as soon as possible a copy of the judge's decision.

The end of September was now near, and my father informed Praskovya Ivanovna that it was time for us to be off : he had promised to return home by Intercession Day ; and his mother was always ailing and now very feeble. But our hostess would not hear of our departure. ' All nonsense ! ' she said ; ' your mother is not feeble at all ; she is quite happy with her daughters, and you left the little grandson, too, to cheer her up. I will let you go in time for Apparition Day.' My father pointed out that it was more than two months to Apparition Day, the 27th of November,

us in the drawing-room. Suddenly a servant came in and handed my father a letter, which had been brought by special messenger from Bagrovo. My father turned pale, and his hands shook ; he unsealed the envelope with difficulty and read the first lines ; then with a sob he dropped the letter on his knee, and said : ‘ My mother is desperately ill.’ This caused a general sensation, but my mother and I were especially struck, because we remembered the dream. Without finishing the letter, my father turned to Praskovya Ivanovna and said resolutely ‘ As you please, aunt, but we go this very day. If you keep my wife, I will go alone, by cart, and trust to getting relays of horses.’ Praskovya Ivanovna was much moved : she said, ‘ Do go at once, all of you ! I won’t keep you.’ My father went out instantly, to give orders for our immediate departure. Then the letter was read through, and it was thus that my aunt Tatyana had written :

‘ MY DEAR BROTHER,

‘ Come back at once. Mother is desperately ill. For three days she has been in a high fever and delirious. We have sent for the priest. I send this by special messenger, my servant Nikolai. I have ordered him to travel day and night. When mother is conscious for a moment, she always asks for you.’

There was a postscript to say that the priest had come, had given her absolution without her being able to confess, and had administered the Sacraments ; the priest said there was little hope. It was obvious that Praskovya Ivanovna was much moved and distressed by this news. She felt great remorse for having kept my father without any

substantial reason, when he wished to return to Bagrovo for Intercession Day. Her brows were knit, and her face was sad and stern. She said nothing for a long time, and there was a general silence. She broke it by saying, 'If he does not find his mother living, then may God preserve and have mercy on us!' Then she got up and went to her own room. Fear and pity contended in my heart: I was sorry for grandmother and still more sorry for my father; but superstitious fear soon got the mastery and swayed all my feelings. My father had promised to return for Intercession Day; on that very day he had dreamed of misfortune and within a few hours, before dinner-time on the same day, the dream had come true. 'What is the meaning of that?' I asked myself. 'How is it possible after that to disbelieve in dreams? Does not God send dreams?' And I did believe in them for a long time, though, to confess the truth, my own dreams never came true.

My mother went off to pack up, and by dinner-time all was ready. Before dinner was served, Praskovya Ivanovna came to our room; she was calm by this time and spoke with a steady voice as she urged my father not to torment himself before he knew the truth, but to rely entirely on the goodness of God.

'I hope,' she said for one thing, 'that God will not punish me, a sinner, so grievously for a fault which I committed in ignorance. I hope that you will find your mother still living, and that on this day, which is the day of the Intercession of Our Lady, she will find relief from her sickness.' My father seemed cheered to some extent by her words. She then took the hands of both my

parents and led them to the parlour, where a number of guests invited for the festival were waiting for us. She made us sit near her and paid special attention to us. The carriage came round to the front, while we were at dinner. When we had finished dinner and drunk our coffee, which our hostess would not let us omit, she got up first, said a prayer, and spoke thus :

' Good-bye, dear friends. I thank Alexyéi Stepanitch for his obedience and compliance with all my wishes, and you, Sofya Nikolayevna, for your love and friendship ; I think you and I will never cease to be friends. Send me a special messenger with news of your mother.'

A few minutes later, we were driving slowly along the muddy road. The wind was blowing ; a thin autumn rain stabbed at the window-pane near which I was sitting ; and constant streams of water, chasing and overtaking one another, covered the whole pane from top to bottom. I watched them mechanically, and had hardly time to realize where I was, before darkness came on and, much sooner, it seemed to me, than usual, surrounded our carriage. There was just a faint red glimmer of sunset in the west. We were all absolutely silent : nobody spoke a single word.

CHAPTER XIX

A JOURNEY IN AUTUMN TO BAGROVO

AT ten o'clock next morning we drove into Simbirsk. The weather was as unpleasant as possible : a fine autumn rain fell from time to time, and a terrible wind never ceased blowing. We stopped at the same house as before, fed the horses, and started at once for the ferry. The descent of the hill of Simbirsk was now infinitely more difficult than the ascent had been : the hill had become a slough, the brakes would not act, and the carriage slipped down sideways at the steep turns. To remain inside was dangerous, and we were all obliged to walk down, in spite of the mud and rain. But the Volga—it is terrible even to think what the Volga was like ! The whole of it had turned into hills of water which moved backwards and forwards, yellow and brown over the sandy shallows and black in the centre of the stream. The water was in constant turmoil and commotion, and actually moaned ; the waves continually lashed the bank and ran up many feet over it. Over all the expanse of water, and especially in the centre of the river, ' white horses ' were running : the crests of the waves, having risen to their full height, suddenly collapsed and were dispersed in broken water and white foam. Unspeakable horror came over me ; the mere thought of that terrible passage froze my blood and nearly deprived me of my senses. On the bank we were told that we could not cross at present,

and that all the ferrymen had gone off, some to the public-house, some to take a meal. But my father was determined to start at once, and sent to hunt up the men. Several of them soon turned up and said we must wait an hour or so ; the wind would abate before sunset, and it would then be possible to land us safely on the other side. In the meantime, while waiting for the propitious time, they began to put the cargo on board. Once again they selected a new ferry-boat, the best they had, and loaded it with our carriage and cart and all the horses. The wind seemed really to be falling. A ferry-boat was seen to put out from the other side, and our own was quickly unmoored and poled upstream along the bank, with the object of starting as high up as possible. Parasha and Yevséitch stayed behind with us. Next a large rowing-boat was got ready for us. Our old acquaintance, the headman or skipper, as he was called, of the ferrymen, made his appearance ; he intended to steer with the stern oar himself, and picked out six men to row us ; but he suggested a delay of half an hour or so. Thank God he did ; for the wind, which had sunk for a few minutes, now began to rage, and the river to seethe, more fiercely than before ; and even the ferrymen said . ‘ We can put you across, no doubt ; but it would be a trifle awkward ; the boat would dance a bit, and the gentry might be frightened.’ At this point I seemed to recover from a kind of stupefaction ; with tears, I begged and prayed that the crossing might be put off till next day. I saw my father angry with me for the first time : he said I was a worthless little coward : Just look at your sister, and be ashamed ! She is only a girl, but she does not cry and ask us to stop !

It was true that my sister was not crying ; but, when asked if she felt courage to go, she said that she did not. My mother, seeing that I was shaking all over with terror, began to press my father to wait till the morning ; but he would not give way. For some time the ferrymen looked at us without speaking ; at last the skipper said .

‘ Well, sir, is it to be for to-morrow ? The wind is bound to fall at dawn, and we will put you across in no time. Just now it’s bad enough, and your ferry-boat will drift down a terrible long way. She’s not begun to cross, and you see she’s below her starting-point already. She’ll drift two versts down. They’ll have to lie to for the night in the cove below, and I doubt if they reach the landing-point to-morrow before you do.’

This settled the question. But now another difficulty arose : we had neither shelter nor bedding nor food. Our clothes, pillows, beds, and provisions had all been started on their way to the other side ; and twelve hours must pass before dawn. The skipper rescued us from our difficulty : he offered us the lodgings on the water-side occupied by himself and his men, and promised to procure us something to eat from the tavern. We gratefully availed ourselves of his offer ; the rain had wetted us thoroughly, and we were glad to enter the warm cabin, the whole of which was made over to us. Tea could not be got at the tavern ; but here again the skipper came to our aid. A merchant whom he knew lived not far away at the foot of the hill ; thither went Yevséitch and the skipper, and an hour later we were sitting at a meal of tea and rolls, which was pleasant and did us good. None of us was inclined for supper, and we went

very early to bed, making the best of dry hay spread over the wooden settles.

Dawn was hardly breaking when we were called ; it was dark even to put on our clothes. How unwilling my sister and I were to get up ! To leave our warm little nest for the damp and cold autumn air, just at dawn when sleep is sweetest, and with the immediate prospect of the boat before us ! But my father never ceased to hurry us, and when dressed we almost ran down to the starting-place ; a red dawn burned through a grey cloud, a sure sign of high wind. There was no rain falling, but one could not call it still : a cutting breeze was already blowing steadily and ruffling the surface of the water. The rowers were seated on the thwarts, oar in hand. The skipper led us quickly along boards into the boat and made us sit down on benches in the centre. Fear clutched at my heart, and I sat there more dead than alive. We first went up a little way and then turned to cross. The oarsmen pulled lustily and the boat flew along ; but as soon as we had reached mid-stream and lost the shelter of the hill, a strong wind blew, we encountered awful waves, and the bow of the boat began to rise and the stern to sink. I screamed out, threw myself on my mother, and squeezed tight against her with my eyes shut. I kept them shut, till I heard that the bank was not far off. And we were really near the bank, but there was some confusion going on in the boat, which I had not noticed before with my eyes shut ; and the skipper looked very anxious and even frightened. Only four men were rowing, and the other two were baling out the boat, one with a long pannikin, the other with his hat. Water was coming through

the boards and wetting our feet, and there was a good depth of it at the stern. I did not fully understand how serious this was, and was much surprised when my father, having seen us all safe ashore, turned in a rage to the skipper.

'You scoundrel,' he cried, 'how dared you give us a leaking boat? You very nearly drowned us. I tell you this, that I shall send you off at once to the police-office at Simbirsk.'

Our poor skipper, standing bare-headed and bowing respectfully, replied thus :

'Can your Honour think I am glad at what has happened, or that I am tired of my own life? I should surely have gone down with you. It is a punishment for my sins. I wished to serve you well: I gave you my best boat, my new one; I never give her except to the quality. She has not been used over a dozen times. We have not set a finger on her since Assumption Day.¹ There was not a drop of water in her when we started. I cannot understand how such a misfortune came about. The blame falls on me, but I am innocent. Be merciful and forgive, and cause me to pray all my life to God for you.'

And down he fell at my father's feet. He was told to get up at once, and assured that his fault was forgiven and no complaint would be made against him.

The ferry-boat with our carriage had not yet arrived at the landing-place: the prophecy of our skipper was fulfilled to the letter. She was poling slowly up-stream, and the ferrymen said that she was still not less than a verst from where we stood. As my father was anxious to discover the cause of

¹ August 15.

the leak in our boat, she was hauled ashore and turned upside down, when it was discovered that she had been bored through close to the stern with some sharp-pointed instrument; the hole was two fingers wide. How this had happened, no one was able to explain. The men discussed it for a long time, and decided that some malicious person had used a tool for the purpose. The hole was some distance above the water-line, and in calm weather there would have been no danger; but the crests of the high waves had found their way in. Had the men not noticed it and begun in good time to bale out the water, the boat would have filled and settled down, and then disaster was inevitable. At last I began to understand the danger to which we had been exposed; and from that time an aversion to crossing great rivers became firmly fixed in my mind. At length our ferry-boat came to land; she had lain to for the night in the shallow water of the cove farther down, made fast to poles stuck in the sand. Our servants reported that they had never in all their lives had such a fright, and that they were up all night struggling with the starving horses, which refused to stand still and several times nearly upset the boat. There followed further delay and further loss of time: we had to drive to Chassovyna, the village on the river, to feed the horses, which had had nothing to eat for twenty-four hours. My father was changed beyond recognition: usually quiet and composed, he was furious at the loss of so much time, and constantly lost his temper. My mother was obliged to reason with him and pacify him, and thus reversed their usual parts—a reversal which I watched with much interest. She spoke for a long time, and better

than a printed book. For one thing, she said, that it was unreasonable to be angry with the Volga and the storm, that such hindrances do not depend on human agency, and that it was sinful to murmur at what was sent by God; we ought, on the contrary, to thank Him for the preservation of our lives. But it is impossible for me to repeat what she said without spoiling it. At last he grew by degrees more composed, though he was still very sad. When the horses were fed, we resumed our journey. We did not spare our good horses, driving nearly ninety versts in two stages; and we reached Vishenki next day at dinner-time. After a halt of four hours, we started again and spent that night at a village called 'Lonely Yard'. Fortune was determined to try my father's patience to the utmost. When his whole soul was longing for Bagrovo and the bedside of his dying mother, hindrances sprang up at every step. Ill luck pursued us, through all the fatigue and grief of our journey. At first, constant rain turned the black soil of the roads into such an appalling slough, that we could hardly cover fifty versts a day. Then it suddenly became cold; and when we rose at dawn, to make an early start from the muddy village of 'Lonely Yard', we found the mud frozen and a shallow coating of snow on the ground. At first this caused my father no anxiety: he said that the frost would make the work less hard for the horses; and my sister and I were pleased by the sight of the clean white fields. But the snow came down heavier every hour, till by evening it was more than a foot deep. The road became terribly heavy, and we could scarcely proceed at a foot pace, as the wet snow stuck to the wheels and

even blocked them. Thus, we covered only thirty versts in the whole of the next day. Towards evening rain fell and nearly melted the snow; and, though the mud was worse than ever, this was a relief to the horses. But here another disaster befell us: my mother fell ill, so ill that we were obliged to stop after twenty-five versts and could not proceed for more than twenty-four hours. How sad my sister and I were! We were lodged in a dirty Choovash cabin. My mother lay under a canopy while my father and Parasha gave her some medicine from time to time. We two sat in a corner, whispering low to one another, or praying to God that He would send relief to our dear mother.

It was only on the seventh day that we reached Nyeklyoodovo rather early in the morning, and drove up to the steps of the oddly built house of the Kalpinskys, not more than twenty versts from Bagrovo. My sister and I had never been there; and my father would not have gone there now, but for the necessity of feeding our jaded horses. Mme Kalpinsky met my mother at the door and took her into the house, while my father lifted us two out of the carriage and led us in. In the parlour we were met by Ivan Kalpinsky: my father exchanged greetings with him and asked at once, 'What news of my mother?' 'Is it possible you have not heard?' asked the master of the house. 'We have had no news for more than a week,' was the answer. 'She died on Intercession Day,' said Kalpinsky very coolly. The effect on my father was terrible. He threw up his hands, crying in a low voice, 'On Intercession Day!'—then he turned pale, shook all over, and would certainly have fallen, had not Kalpinsky caught him and

put him on a chair. My mother, who had heard meanwhile in the drawing-room of my grandmother's death, now hastened to meet us, and was terribly alarmed to see my father in such a condition. She rushed to his aid; cold water was brought, and his face sprinkled and his head wetted; he regained consciousness, and the tears flowed fast down his colourless cheeks. He was given a glass of water to drink and was taken by Kalpinsky to the study, where he wept like a little child for more than an hour, saying over and over at intervals: 'God will judge my aunt! The weight of this sin lies on her soul!'

Meanwhile eager and even angry conversation went on around him, between Mme Kalpinsky and her sister, Mme Lupenevsky, who was staying in the house. In the minutest detail they described the last sufferings and death of my poor grandmother—how she called in vain for her son; how on the very day of the funeral snow fell so heavily that it was impossible to convey the body to Nyeklyoodovo, where a grave had been dug; and how they had been obliged to bury her at Mordovsky Boogoorooslan, seven versts from Bagrovo.

'See how God disposes when man proposes!' said Mme Lupenevsky: 'Stepan Mihailovitch, our uncle who is gone—the kingdom of heaven be his!—never liked Nyeklyoodovo and would not hear of being buried there; and yet his bones are lying beside our church. But our aunt loved us like her own daughters, and wished with all her heart to be laid at Nyeklyoodovo by her husband's side, and gave orders that it should be done; but she is forced to lie near her father Vassili at Mordovsky Boogoorooslan.'

Mme Kalpinsky then said in a low voice as if to herself : ' They didn't want it themselves, and that was the reason. It was the General's lady ; it always is ! It was quite possible to bring the body here : the snow was gone in twenty-four hours.' But the other replied at once :

' No, no, sister ! That is a wicked slander against cousin Elizabeth and them all. It was impossible to get through either in sledges or on wheels ; we started ourselves for the funeral and had to turn back after all : the bridge over the Savrusha was quite blocked ! Nor was it possible for them to wait : the snow might not have melted. No, sister, do not say such wicked things ! Clearly it was the will of God. But it makes one's heart ache, that our cousin did not find his mother in life.'

This was the kind of consolation administered to the bereaved son by the ladies of the house. They began to quarrel and spoke louder and louder. My mother begged them all to leave my father alone ; she cleared the room even of us and stayed with him herself. She told me afterwards that he wept on for a long time, but at last fell asleep in her arms. Mme Kalpinsky had three daughters and one son, almost a baby. We were complete strangers, and they were shy of us at first, but soon became very friendly, and we thought them very good-natured. They tried to comfort us ; for we were both crying for our grandmother, and I was crying still more for my father, for whom I felt more sorrow than I can express. They gave us tea and food, and wished to give some to my parents ; but when I looked in at their door, my mother made a gesture of refusal ; and I asked that they

should not be disturbed. Two hours later, my mother came out and said: 'Glory to God! Alexyéi Stepanitch is quieter now; only he is anxious to start at once.' But, as the horses needed food and a good rest, we stayed two hours longer and even dined there; but my father would not come to table and ate nothing. Immediately after dinner we said good-bye and started off. During the rest of the journey I never took my eyes off my father's face. It expressed deep and inconsolable grief; and I fancied at once that he had loved his mother more than his father: though he shed tears at grandfather's death, yet I had never seen him wear such a sad expression. My mother took pains to talk to him and tried to make him answer her questions. She spoke of grandmother with much feeling and tenderness, and said to my father:

'You may comfort yourself with the thought that you were always a most dutiful son, never causing her anxiety and always scrupulously fulfilling her wishes. She lived long, for a woman'—she was seventy-four years old—'and after your father's death nothing gave her comfort: she wished herself to die soon.'

The violence of his grief had passed, but he still wept as he said:

'That is all true, and I should not feel it so terribly, if only I had received her last blessing and been present to close her eyes. It is all due to my aunt. Why did she keep me there? From mere caprice.'

But my mother stopped him, begging him not to be angry with Praskovya Ivanovna and blame her: she could not foresee such a misfortune, and

was terribly distressed herself, though she made no display of her feelings. 'True, true,' said my father with a sigh; and again his tears fell as he embraced my mother. All the time my sister and I were crying quietly, and even Parasha was wiping her eyes. The journey from Nyeklyoodovo to Bagrovo was spent in conversation of this kind, and came to an end sooner than I expected. As the carriage rumbled across the bridge over the Boogoorooslan, I realized for the first time that we were so near our dear Bagrovo. The thought dispelled my grief for the moment, and I turned quickly to the window to look out at our large pond. But oh how gloomy and sad it looked! A fierce wind was blowing, and the dark waves drifting all over the pond made me think of the Volga; a lowering sky was reflected in the water; the reeds were yellow and withered and sent forth a dull melancholy sound, as they were lashed to and fro by the wind and waves. Of the green banks and green trees there was not a trace. Trees, banks, mill, and peasants' houses—all alike were wet and black and muddy. The joyful bark of Soorka and Tresor (a setter, and another great favourite of mine) welcomed us in the court; and immediately afterwards I was aware that six persons were standing on the steps, my four aunts and my uncles Yerlykin and Karatayeff. They greeted us with that loud wail of mourning which I had heard before at grandfather's funeral. Our carriage had been sighted some way off, when we began to descend the hill; and therefore not only our relations but all the servants and many of the labourers and their wives were assembled near the front door.

CHAPTER XX

LIFE AT BAGROVO AFTER MY GRANDMOTHER'S DEATH

THE reader can imagine the scene at the door—all the kissing and embracing, all the weeping and sobbing and wailing. My mother soon took us children into the house, but it was long before my father joined us: he had to receive and return the sorrowful greeting of each individual. At last we all met in the drawing-room, and our baby brother was brought there also. He was delighted to see my sister and me; during our short separation he had grown bigger and much prettier, and was beginning to speak plainer. Our cousins, the two daughters of Mme Yerlykin, were there too; we were glad to see them, but they did not receive us warmly. The whole evening was devoted to mournful accounts of grandmother's illness and death. She had a presentiment that she would never see her son again, and often spoke of it before her illness began; and when she became ill, she had no doubt she would soon die and said, 'I shall not see Alosha again.' It appeared that her illness was not due to any fatal disease but to the rich unwholesome food of which she was so fond. She had given no special directions before her death; but she had commissioned my aunt Aksinya, as her oldest daughter, to beg my father and mother to be kind to Tanyusha; she also left a message for my mother, asking forgiveness for wrongs which she had done her. And this message Aksinya

delivered in public, to the great surprise and annoyance of her sisters. I heard later that they had tried all means—threats as well as entreaties—to stop her from using terms which they thought humiliating to their dead mother; but she would not listen to them and even repeated the words in their presence. This was my mother's answer:

'I forgive her with my whole heart, if she—the kingdom of heaven be hers!—ever was in anything unjust to me. It is a great grief to me that I could not ask her forgiveness; for I was not guiltless myself as regards her; but I hope that she forgave me, for she had a kind heart.'

Then the conversation ran for a long time on the fatal date of Intercession Day: by that day grandmother had asked us to return, and on that day she died; again, my father had been alarmed by a portentous dream and had received news of his mother's illness on that same day. To all these topics I listened with special attention. Calling to mind our first stay at Bagrovo and some expressions which had forced their way from my mother's lips and had been noted by me at the time, I tried to form some clear and definite idea in my own mind of the wrongs which my mother and grandmother had been guilty of in their conduct to one another, and my belief in presentiments and prophetic dreams was much strengthened in consequence of these conversations.

Early next morning, my father went with my aunt Tatyana to Mordovsky Boogoorooslan. Next day was the ninth since grandmother's death, and all the family were to meet there, to hear a Mass for the repose of her soul; but my father was so

impatient to see his mother's grave and to weep over it, that he was determined not to wait a whole day longer. Long before dinner-time he came back, pale and distressed. My aunt reported, that as soon as he saw his mother's grave, he ran to it in a sort of frenzy, threw his arms out on the damp earth, and lay there as if dead.

'My brother terrified me,' she went on; 'I thought he was dead and began to scream; Father Vassili and his wife came running out, and the three of us drew him away with difficulty and took him half-conscious to the priest's house. There, glory be to God! he grew calmer, and we said the prayers for the dead. I gave orders for the requiem Mass to-morrow, and they will toll the bell as soon as we arrive.'

Again I thought that my father had been much fonder of grandmother than of grandfather.

That same day a special messenger was sent to Praskovya Ivanovna. My mother wrote her a long letter and read it aloud to my father, who only added a few lines of his own. I thought her letter wonderful at the time; but I was too young to understand and appreciate it fully; and when this letter fell into my hands later, I was amazed by the tact and even artistic skill with which it was written. It contained a perfectly true account of grandmother's death and my father's terrible grief; yet, at the time, it was expressed in such affectionate and considerate language that it was calculated to allay rather than embitter the sorrow of Praskovya Ivanovna, who was bound to be deeply affected by the news that grandmother had died before our arrival.

On the ninth day, the usual day for a requiem

service, the whole family, except us three children and our two cousins, made an early start for Mordovsky Boogoorooslan, taking with them Mme Kalpinsky and Mme Lupenevsky, who had come to the house the day before. My mother wished to take me too ; but the weather was cold and damp, and I was not well, suffering from some fever and headache. I had probably caught cold from running several times to look at my pigeons and hawks in their winter quarters. When the house was empty, I peeped into grandmother's room : it looked bare and sad, just as I had seen it after grandfather's death. The very same pair, Miséitch and red-haired Vaska, were chanting the Psalms for their mistress. I wished to chant myself, but I could not get through a whole page : every word echoed in my ears and hurt my head. The whole party returned in time for dinner, bringing the priest and his wife with them. A large table was laid in the parlour and covered with a great number of dishes ; at the end of dinner pancakes of different kinds were served, and all the party, except, of course, my father and mother, ate heartily of them, crossing themselves and making mention of the dead, just as they had done after my grandfather's death. I hardly ate anything and was half asleep ; I felt so ill. But I remember that my mother refused to sit at the head of the table, saying that her sister Tatyana, so long as she remained unmarried, would always be the mistress of the house. I remember too that both my uncles, and even Mme Kalpinsky and Mme Lupenevsky, drank a great deal of beer and strong waters, and were uncommonly cheerful before dinner was over.

When we rose from table, I lay down on a sofa and went to sleep ; I was carried off to bed later, but I remember nothing of it. For three days and nights I lay in the delirium of fever. When I became conscious again, I thought at first that I had awakened after a long sleep. My mother was sitting at my bedside ; she looked thin and pale ; but what joy her face expressed, when she was convinced that the fever had left me and that my mind was not wandering ! What tears of happiness flowed down her cheeks ! What a look there was in her eyes as she gazed at me ! How she kissed my hands ! I received her caresses with astonishment, and was still more astonished when I noticed that my head and arms were bandaged, and felt pain in my chest and the back of my head and calves of my legs. I tried to get up but had not strength to rise. Then my mother explained to me that I was ill and suffering from fever, that I had poultices of black bread and vinegar and crushed juniper berries on my head and arms, Spanish blisters on my neck and chest, and mustard plasters on my calves. It may be that all this was needless ; or it may be that my rapid recovery from fever was really due to the healing virtue of these applications. The chief pleasure in the world is recovery after a bad illness, especially when one sees the joy it gives to all around. My father came to my bedside, my sister, and my little brother ; they all kissed me with smiling faces, but my mother threw herself on her knees before the shrine of the ikons, and wept while she gave thanks. Remembering at once that my mother never prayed in the presence of others, I wondered what this could mean ; but my heart soon

told me the reason. When her prayer was done, she turned her whole attention, her whole being, to the task of watching over me. Fearing that the presence and conversation of others might excite me, she allowed no one to stay with me long. In fact, I was so weak that I was tired out and soon fell asleep; and this time it was real sleep, the sleep which restores strength, so that I woke up in a few hours much stronger and more cheerful. Then I had more visitors—my aunts Aksinya and Tatyana, very much pleased to see me better, and next Yevsitch, who even cried for joy. From him I learnt that all the visitors and relations had dispersed, the day after I was taken ill; my aunt Aksinya, my godmother and the kindest of women, alone stayed on at Bagrovo, though her own children at home were far from well at the time: but she saw the terrible anxiety and alarm of my parents, and hoped to have an opportunity of helping them. My mother warmly appreciated her kind and loving heart, and did all she could to show her gratitude. When she saw that I was much better and on the way to recovery, she urged my aunt Aksinya to go home at once.

My convalescence lasted about a week. It was long enough for me to understand and feel a mother's love in all its strength. Of course, I had known before, and saw at every step, that my mother loved me; I had been told, and I dimly remembered for myself, how she had watched over me in infancy, when I was so feeble that my death was expected at any minute; and I knew that her constant care had saved my life. But knowledge derived from recollection and the reports of others is not at all the same thing as a fresh

immediate experience of one's own. When I was well and no danger threatened me, the ordinary course of life did not call forth or display so vividly the infinite treasure of a mother's love, hidden in the depths of the heart. For some time past I had never had an illness; and then, suddenly, in the depth of the country where no medical aid was procurable, my mother saw her first-born son, the darling of her heart, fevered and delirious. Is it hard to understand the agony of fear she suffered, or her passionate joy when the danger had passed away? I was older now, and was able to understand that passionate joy and the strength of a mother's love. That week did much to open my eyes and develop my mind; and my attachment to my mother became more conscious and grew to a pitch seldom reached by a child of that age. From my recovery until we left Bagrovo, I spent all my time with her, and the stormy autumn weather made this more natural. It need hardly be said that half our time was spent in reading aloud; sometimes she read to me, and she read so well that I listened to what I had long known as if it were new—listened with peculiar pleasure, and found, in the pages which she read to me, merits which I had never discovered before.

Meanwhile, the special messenger who had carried the letter to Praskovya Ivanovna returned before I had completely recovered. He brought with him a long letter dictated by Praskovya Ivanovna; she did not write herself, because writing was to her a difficult business. It was long, compared to the ordinary letters dictated by her or written in her name, which were usually comprised in a few lines. She had fully appreciated, or

I should rather say felt my mother's letter to her. Her gratitude for it was strongly and warmly expressed; and she spoke again of my mother as her 'dear friend'. She expressed much sorrow that the death of my grandmother had taken place before our arrival, blamed herself for having kept my father, begged his forgiveness, and urged him not to torment himself but to submit to the will of God.

'If I was not afraid,' she wrote, 'of causing you trouble, I would come myself, as soon as the snow makes travelling possible, and share this time of sorrow with you. Yours, I am sure, is indeed a house of mourning: with no neighbours and not a soul to speak to, you will only make one another more wretched and depressed. Would it not be a good plan, if all of you, including the children and Tanyusha, would come to Choorassovo and spend the whole winter with me? Do consider this. I should feel less uneasy about you all, and happy in the society of Sofya Nikolayevna'—and more to the same effect.

This invitation, coming in the middle of her letter, was regarded as a passing idea which was not really serious but had chanced to come into her head. My father said, 'Another strange fancy of my aunt's! If one spends all one's life travelling and visiting, one might as well have no home at all.' My aunt Tatyana added that a rich and fashionable house, crammed with visitors from morning till night, was no place for a plain woman like her; and, besides that, she had no mind for merriment just now. Even my mother said that it was impossible for her to drag about three small children in the depth of winter. A

letter was written in accordance with these opinions and sent off by the earliest post to 'Praskovya Ivanovna. Her kind proposal was consigned to oblivion.

My father spent whole days at first with his blind agent, Pantelyéi; then he set to work to write; next he listened while what had been written by Pantelyéi was read by his pupil, Ivan; and finally he read to Pantelyéi what he himself had written. They were working together at the framing of a petition to the Senate, with reference to the lawsuit with the Bogdanoffs. Pretty often I heard disputes, and rather warm disputes, between them, in which the blind agent, though the most modest and respectful of men, always came off victorious. It was said that he knew all the laws by heart, and I believed it; for I often heard him quote an *ukaz*, giving the exact date, the different articles and paragraphs, and the precise language, as confidently as if the book were lying open before him and he could see it with his own eyes. His own language was very bookish, and he chose his words with the utmost care when speaking on the commonest topics. Thus he would commonly address my father like this: 'Would you have the goodness, my dear Sir, Alexyéi Stepanitch. . . .' He dictated very fast and fiercely, with constant movements of his head and hands. Sometimes I crept into his room so softly that he did not hear me, and stood there for a long time, leaning against the stove: there he sat curled up on a high couch, smoking a short pipe, which he was constantly cleaning out and refilling; then he struck a light on a piece of tinder and began to smoke again. He spoke in a loud animated voice,

and his pupil, a rapid writer who had been with him constantly for years, had hardly time to take it all down and repeat aloud the last few words of what he had written. I looked with respectful awe at this blind man, and marvelled at the intelligence and memory which made up for the loss of his eyes.

I spent nearly all my time in my mother's room and practically lived there : I read and wrote and, as my bed stood there, generally slept in that room. The consequence was that I played less with my sister and saw her less often than before. I have said already that my mother was less tender and loving to her than to me, and so it was natural and inevitable that my sister should not be tender and loving to her ; she was even rather timid and uneasy in my mother's presence. Though my mother never sent her away from the room, yet my sister felt a kind of oppression there, and slipped off when she had a good opportunity. Then my mother would say : ' That child has no affection at all for me ; she's always watching for a chance to leave me and go back to her nurse.' I thought so myself then, and I was silent and sad ; for I could not defend my sister and believed that she had little love for her mother. The truth was, that her love was always much warmer and deeper than my own ; but this did not appear till later.

The conduct of my aunt Tatyana, or rather her bearing towards others, underwent a sudden change about this time ; she seemed at least quite different. She had been a rather lively and cheerful girl, with a full measure of the freedom and independence natural to a grown-up daughter of the house ; but now she became depressed, quiet, and timid, and so ready to oblige, that my

mother, who was the chief object of her attentions, did not like it. Indeed, my mother said one day to my father :

‘ Alexyéï Stepanitch, I wish you would tell your sister not to run errands for me in that way, just as a maid-servant might. I am ashamed to accept services of that kind from her ; and, in general, I object to it.’

But my father took quite a different view of the case.

‘ Come, come, my dear,’ he said, ‘ I see nothing objectionable in that. My sister is accustomed to show respect and attention to the head of the household—to my father while he lived, and then to my mother ; and now, as you are mistress at Bagrovo, she shows the same attentions to you.’

My mother did not discuss it ; but I was in the room a few days later, when my aunt ran to place a footstool for her. My mother stopped her at once and said in a very determined voice :

‘ I beg you, sister, never to do that, unless you wish to make me angry. I have long been intending to speak to you frankly of our present position, and this gives me the chance. Please sit down on the bed beside me, and listen attentively to what I say. Much of it will not please you ; but I do it, not to create a quarrel, but to get rid of a possible cause of discomfort between us in future. I want you not to be mistaken about me, not to suppose that I know nothing and understand nothing. That is not so : I know very well that your sisters, except Aksinya, never liked me, carried false tales against me to their father, and wished to do me any harm they could. Your mother believed them implicitly, took their view of every-

thing, and even dared not—their character was stronger than hers—go against them. You did the same; but I do not blame you: it was impossible for the youngest daughter to act in opposition to her elder sisters and her own mother. From your earliest years, you were accustomed to believe them and obey them. Now I have no wish to conceal that I never loved your sisters, and have not forgotten the slights they put on me; but I will never try to punish them. Your case is different: I have long ago forgiven and forgotten all that was unpleasant. They have tried to make you believe that I am your enemy; and you have sometimes believed it, though you have a kind heart. The truth is that I am your well-wisher, and I shall prove it by my actions. You know your brother's character, how slow he is to act and how apt to postpone business; it would take him a long time to get your affairs settled, I mean, to secure you the legal ownership of your serfs and transfer them to your land; and the land, too, though the price has been settled, is not yet paid for. If I say nothing, he will do nothing about it, likely enough, till you come to be married; and since the unsettled state of your affairs may prevent your marriage and deprive you of a desirable suitor, therefore I give you my word that everything shall be settled in the course of the present year. I shall give Alexyéi Stepanitch no rest till he carries out the wish of his parents and makes good his own promise. You will have then a roof of your own; and if you prefer to live here, you will do so of your own free will. For my part, I shall be very glad if you will stay with us. The management of a house is not a thing that I am fond of,

and I shall be grateful to you if you attend to it as you have done in the past. But I must ask you not to jump about in my presence or run my errands; I want you to behave to me as my equal, and, in short, to do just as you did in your mother's lifetime. Will you agree?'

Long before she ended, my aunt Tatyana had dissolved in tears. She had made several attempts to rush into the arms of her 'darling sister', if not to bow down before her; but each time my mother held out an opposing arm. As may be supposed, she agreed heartily to everything, and could not find words to express her gratitude for my mother's 'great favours and benefits'. She added that she had collected all the personal belongings of her mother and made an inventory of them; and they would all be handed over to her sister-in-law. My mother replied with much warmth:

'Do you really think that I mean to claim the clothes and other odds and ends left by my mother-in-law, when her own daughter is still living and unmarried? Ah, how little you know me! I won't have any of the things! I won't even look at them! They are all yours.'

There naturally followed a fresh burst of the warmest gratitude on the part of my aunt.

This scene served to explain to me fully for the first time the position which my mother had held in my father's family. When I recalled what I had heard at different times from Parasha, and also certain words which had burst from my mother's lips in the course of heated discussions with my father, I could form a pretty clear conception of the people with whom she had lived, and of their

ways. It is easy to understand what a superior being my mother seemed to me. I began to look on her with veneration, was proud of her, and loved her more dearly every day.

Suddenly and quite unexpectedly a letter came to us by the post from Praskovya Ivanovna ; and we were all surprised to find that it was twice as long as the first. One by one, she went through all the reasons which made it undesirable that we should spend the winter at Bagrovo ; and this time she positively insisted that we should travel to Choorassovo in six weeks' time and stay with her till Lent. The letter consisted partly of tender entreaties and partly of positive commands ; and, without a word said, every one felt that a refusal was out of the question. A special note was enclosed for my aunt Tatyana, very kind and very urgent. Praskovya Ivanovna wrote that she would prepare for her a pretty room, quite apart from every one else ; Darya Vassilyevna had occupied it but was now transferred to one of the wings ; Tatyana would live there in peace and undisturbed by any one ; just when she felt inclined, she could enjoy our society and that of the mistress of the house. When both letters had been read, nobody spoke for some time, and there was a general air of dissatisfaction. At last my father broke the silence and began : ' Well, my dear, what's to be done ? We must comply with my aunt's wishes. We have really no good reason for refusing ; and she would be displeased.' My mother answered that she, too, did not know how to get out of it ; the move in winter for the children was her only difficulty. ' And what do you say, Tanyusha ? ' asked my father. My aunt

said at once that nothing would induce her to go : she would die of home-sickness at Choorassovo ; and she was unwilling to go so soon to such a distance from her mother's grave. ' Where will you live, then ? ' my father went on ; ' it's impossible for you to stop alone at Bagrovo.' My aunt thought for a moment and then said that she would go and stay with her sister Alexandra, and that they would visit the grave together once a month and pray there and have Mass said. Thus the talk went on, and the party broke up without having settled anything definitely.

I felt, however, that our going was inevitable, and disliked the prospect more than any one else. I felt it the more, because I had learnt a new amusement and become very fond of it, a few days before we received the letter. Yevséitch had taught me how to set a bow-trap for the small birds that abounded in our garden. There was already a light covering of snow on the ground ; and Yevséitch cleared a patch and strewed chaff and dregs of hempseed on it for bait. As it was getting hard for the birds to find food, they welcomed the supply and in a day or two became accustomed to fly to the bait. Then Yevséitch set the trap behind the bare patch, with a net over it, tied a cord to it, and brought the cord through a gooseberry bush, behind which it was easy for one or two people to hide themselves. When the birds got accustomed to the trap, and began to settle near it and pick the seed without fear, Yevséitch took me cautiously to the bush, where we could watch through the leafless branches all that happened on the bare patch.

' Bend down and keep quite still,' whispered

Yevséitch, crouching down; 'better birds will come soon—just now they're all linnets; then you catch hold of the cord and pull! All the birds will be trapped, and you and I will pick out the best and put them in a cage.'

I was ready to do as I was told. In a few minutes Yevséitch called out, 'Now! pull!' Trembling with excitement and delight, I pulled with all my might, and we jumped up from behind the bush and ran to the trap. It was not quite successful: I had pulled too hard, so that one side of the trap had been raised, leaving part of the patch uncovered; but some birds were left fluttering under the net, and we caught a pair of goldfinches, a chaffinch, and a linnet. I ran home with our booty, and Yevséitch ran too; it was one of his strong points, that every kind of sport excited him as much as it did me. I soon learnt to use the trap with skill; and as I was unwilling to let go the birds I caught, when I had filled several cages with them, I put a number of all kinds in a sort of aviary with a net round it, which was not far from the front door, and in which my pigeons lived in summer. It was empty now, because the pigeons were spending the winter under the stoves in peasants' cabins. In the aviary there was a trough with water, in which I put snow when the water froze; and there were two small birch-trees, on which the birds perched and roosted; and I scattered food of all sorts on the ground. It was a real joy to me to stand by this aviary and watch the quick lively movements of the pretty little birds, and to observe them while they ate and drank and squabbled with each other. Sometimes I would

have stayed there the whole day with my face pressed against the rime-covered net, unconscious of the cold of early November and my insufficient clothing, had not my mother sent for me, or Yevséitch carried me off against my will to the warmth inside the house.

The day after Praskovya Ivanovna's letter was received, my parents, who had probably talked it all over by themselves, announced their intention to start for Choorassovo as soon as ever the snow made travelling possible. That very day, orders were given to all concerned to be ready for the journey, and make all necessary preparations. The time of our departure depended on the freezing of the Volga; and information of this event was to be sent us at once from Vishenki. My aunt Tatyana kept to her intention of not going to Choorassovo but living with her sister Alexandra till our return. My mother did not press her to go with us; I heard her say to my father that Tatyana would feel constrained and unhappy at Choorassovo. A letter was written at once to my aunt Alexandra to inform her of this plan. My aunt Tatyana had one cause for uneasiness: she was unwilling to part from her storehouse, or rather from all its precious contents. She confessed her doubts to my father: she feared that, when Bagrovo was empty, thieves might break into the storehouse at night and steal all her property, which she had scraped together, 'thanks to the generosity of her father and mother, continued by her brother and sister-in-law.' She asked my father to provide her with horses, so that she might transfer some part of it at least to Karatayevka for safety. My father,

though he thought this unnecessary, yielded to his sister's persistent entreaties. Later I heard Yevsitch and Parasha whispering to one another and making fun secretly of my aunt's apprehensions

Snow went on falling almost every night, and there was a fresh surface of it every morning. My father was fond of taking a gun and tracking hares through the snow; but, sad to say, he would not take me: he said I should be in his way and would get tired out. But to make up for this and give me some fun, he told one of the men to get on a horse and mark down a hare; then he took me with him, intending that I should see the hare caught in a net.

'Look! there is the hare's form, Seryozha,' said my father, pointing to a patch of withered rushes, near some bushes at the foot of a hill. 'As the hare will run uphill, the nets are laid on that line. Do you see them, hanging on the bushes? Now watch how they do it.'

We had a score of beaters; some kept behind, while others walked forwards at the sides; so the line advanced in a half-circle, while the men shouted and beat the rushes with long sticks. In an instant the hare sprang out and made like an arrow for the hill; then he struck the net, and carried it along some distance by his impetus, till his head and paws were caught and he was finally entangled and upset. The beaters shouted and ran as fast as they could to the imprisoned hare, and I did the same. What a beauty that grand old hare was! How I admired the black tips of his ears, his black stump of a tail, his yellow chest and forelegs, and the striped and

curling line that ran down his back ! I was half-choked by a passionate joy which I could not explain myself.

And from all this I was doomed to go away, to spend a whole winter at Choorassovo, which I did not love, where many of the perpetual succession of visitors were not to my taste, where I must avoid contact with the objectionable servants of the house, and where I should have to spend most of my time in the rooms which I knew so well and disliked so much. And besides, I should enjoy much less of my mother's society. My sister too was unwilling to go to Choorassovo, though that place offered her the special advantage of my constant society ; and she loved me so tenderly that in my presence she was always quite content and very happy.

When forty days had passed since my grandmother's death, the time came for the commemoration service for her. The roads, thinly covered with snow, had turned into heaps of frozen mud, formidable for wheels or sledges ; yet all the members of the family met at Bagrovo the day before. Early on the 9th of November the whole party, except us children, were conveyed to Mordovsky Boogoorooslan, where they listened to a requiem service and had prayers offered over the grave. Then they returned to drink tea and coffee, which were soon followed by dinner ; and this meal of mourners was an exact repetition of the scene I have described more than once already : the party ate and drank, shed tears and spoke of the departed, and when all was over they went away.

And now deeper snow came down, and hard frost set in and made the walls of our house crack.

My aunt Alexandra had come to fetch her sister. At last we got news that the Volga was frozen and trains of wagons were making their way across it. The day of our departure was fixed. A sledge was brought round to the steps, and room in it had to be found for myself, my sister and Parasha, and my little brother with Matrona, who had now exchanged the duties of foster-mother for those of nurse. Another sledge was brought round for my parents. Plenty of food had been cooked for the journey; we packed ourselves into our places; and on the 21st of November the sledge runners began to creak on the snow and we started. My mother could not bear this creaking noise; no more could I, and I cried, as I took my seat in the sledge. My aunt Tatyana was to start the same day with her sister for Karatayevka.

Our journey from Bagrovo to Choorassovo was accomplished successfully and quickly. Sledging in Russia at the beginning of winter is magnificent, if the snow has fallen evenly with calm weather, and, while deep enough to cover all the uneven places in the road, is not so deep as to make it impossible to drive three horses harnessed abreast. It was just like that on this journey. We had our own horses and travelled faster than we had ever done before. The pace was so great and the snow so powdery that the creaking of the runners was hardly audible, and both my mother and I were almost free from the feeling of sickness throughout the journey. At Vishenki we only stopped to feed the horses. My father, of course, had an interview with the bailiff, asking him many questions and noting down the answers to report

to Praskovya Ivanovna. The winter aspect of the castle or palace of Nikolskoë reminded me of the noble entertainment provided for us by Doorassoff; and though only a few months had passed since then, the excitement and astonishment which I had felt then already seemed to me absurd. Doorassoff was not at home, and we put up at the house of a well-to-do peasant. My father always talked to the householder, wherever we stopped for food or sleep; and I enjoyed listening to these conversations. My mother, as a rule, was bored by them; but our host on this occasion was a remarkably intelligent man, who talked about his master in a way that much amused my mother and interested us all. He appeared to praise Doorassoff and yet always displayed him in a very absurd light. We talked of the magnificent pair of pigs, one of which had died.

'Yes, yes,' said the man, 'such a calamity! The best of the pigs is dead! Our master—God grant him health and long life, a kind and merciful gentleman, with a soft heart for all manner of beasts—felt it so much that he went away and left the place; he wasn't so fond of us, you see. That was just it: he had plenty of us, but only two pigs, and they came from over the sea, while we were born on the place. Oh, a kind gentleman, one can't say how kind; and so ingenious too. Just outside the village we had two wells, with splendid cold spring-water. Well, he made us put up by each well a wooden woman, dressed in a red *sarafân*,¹ and gold lace round her middle,

¹ A bodice without sleeves, cut very low and square in the neck, with a skirt joined on to the bodice; worn by young peasant women.

but her feet were bare; she had one foot on the well and the other lifted up as if she were going to jump. Well, every one who passes, on horse or on foot, stops and looks, of course; but the peasants have ceased to draw water from the wells; they say that it does not look nice.'

The man was fond of talking and said much more of the same kind. Much of it I did not understand, but my mother said that it was all clever and malicious. What I did understand, however, was enough for me to draw a conclusion and make a discovery: the peasant had made fun of the gentleman, whereas I was accustomed to think that all peasants looked up with awe to their masters, and never criticized what was said or done by them. I decided to pay special attention to all conversations between Yevséitch and Parasha, to find out whether they too made fun of us in private, while praising us to our faces and kissing our hands. When I told my mother of this intention, she laughed and said, 'What good will it do you to know that? We get good service from Parasha and still more from Yevséitch; but their opinion of us is a matter of indifference to me.' But I felt curious on the point, and did not give up my intention.

Next day we drove over my old enemy, the Volga, on ice as smooth as a mirror; but even this aspect of the great river frightened me. The ice over the Volga was unusually clean that year. There had been few blizzards and little snow, so that there were few blocks of ice or heaps of frozen snow on the surface. Frost alone had fettered the surface of the river, and one could look through the transparent ice and see the

water running below, circling and eddying, and white bubbles coursing here and there. I confess that I could not, without trembling, look down from the sledge-window upon that awful mass of moving water, over which our horses were galloping. Suddenly I noticed on one side, not far from the beaten track, something that looked like a long opening in the ice, and smoke rising from it. I was astonished and asked Parasha to look and explain it to me. She looked and said laughing:

‘Oh, that’s a gap in the ice, where the water never freezes; it’s Volga breathing that makes the smoke come out; and stakes are put along the edge, to prevent any one from tumbling in at night.’

This was new to me and interesting, but my head was full of one single thought—that we might go through at any moment and plunge under the ice. Fear mastered me, and I had recourse to my usual expedient in such cases: I shut my eyes tight and never opened them till we reached the other side of the Volga.

At Simbirsk we got news that Praskovya Ivanovna was not quite well and very impatient to see us. Next day, the fifth since we left Bagrovo, just at noon, the four crosses of the two churches and belfries at Choorassovo glittered before our eyes.

It is impossible to describe the joy which Praskovya Ivanovna showed at our arrival. Forgetting her ailment, she ran, rather than walked, out into the hall. Never had I seen her wear such a face of delight. She embraced my father and mother, held them tight in her arms, and would not let them go, especially my mother;

she even kissed us children all round, which she never used to do, only giving us her hand to kiss.

‘Oh, so the little blackamoor has come too,’ she said laughing; ‘he’s grown much prettier, but where on earth did he get that nose from? Hearty greetings, friends from over the Volga! How are your friends and neighbours, the Choo-vashes and Mordvinians? You are welcome, my friends. And Tatyana has not come? She was frightened, I suppose, and shut herself up. I dare say she went to Karatayevka? Well, if the gentleman there takes too much to drink and gives her a beating, she will repent then that she didn’t come to me. Well, glory be to God, I have got you at last. Let us go straight to the drawing-room.’

In the parlour and drawing-room we were met by the inevitable crowd of visitors.

We settled down again in our familiar quarters and began the old life again. There was this difference, that Praskovya Ivanovna was infinitely kinder and more winning, as it seemed to me. It was plain to all that she was warmly attached to my mother and to us all; nothing was too good for us, and she tried every means to make us happy. But I noticed, in spite of this, that Alexandra Kovrigin and Darya Vassilyevna were not so much pleased as on our former visits. As to the servants, men and women, it was still clearer that we were simply unwelcome to them. When I told my mother what I had observed, she said it was utter nonsense, and that I had no business to notice such a thing. I was not content, however, with this explanation, and repeated my discovery to Yevséitch in Parasha’s presence.

‘Yes,’ he said; ‘it’s clear they are tired of us; we *are* coming terribly often’; and Parasha added: ‘They don’t fear the other visitors, but your family is different: they’re afraid of your repeating something to Praskovya Ivanovna.’ I was convinced in my own mind that this was perfectly true, though my mother would not admit it.

The Minitskys soon came to the house, bringing the two eldest of their daughters with them. My sister and I were fond of them and glad to see them; and we began again our former games and our former readings. From morning till night I was inseparable from my sister: all indoor occupations and amusements were shared alike by both of us.

As regards the harmful influence of the men and maids at Choorassovo, my mother had no need to trouble herself on that score: as if they had passed the word, they all avoided us and never spoke a word in our presence. Even Ivanushka, the butler, when we were there, gave up his old custom of coming in for a chat with Yevséitch; and Yevséitch said to me one day, with a good-natured laugh, ‘Better as it is! They’re actually fighting shy of us!’

Praskovya Ivanovna soon recovered entirely from her slight cold. Christmas Day was the festival on which the new church, erected by herself, had been consecrated, and she kept the anniversary with all the pomp and display that was possible in a country place. Such a number of visitors were invited that they overflowed both wings of the house, and some of the smaller land-owners and some bachelor neighbours were put

up in peasants' houses. I was told that no such gathering had ever been seen there; I cannot confirm that statement, but this I know, that the visitors were a greater nuisance to me than ever. I hardly saw my parents at all; and nothing but the friendship between my sister and me, which grew stronger daily and even hourly, beguiled for me the dullness and weariness of life at Choorassovo. My sister had now become a real friend, with whom I could share all my childish feelings and thoughts.

So December passed away and a new year began, and I met it with a vague belief that something was going to happen. On the 2nd of January my mother surprised me by saying: 'Seryozha, would you like to go with me to Kazan? Your father and I are going there for a fortnight.'

I was delighted to leave Choorassovo and answered that I should like very much to go. 'Very well, then, get ready,' said she; and I promised to be ready in half an hour. Then I suddenly thought of my sister, and asked whether she would go with us. When my mother said that she would stay behind at Choorassovo, I was vexed. On my speaking to my sister of my departure, she wept bitterly. Though I was passionately devoted to my mother and quite unaccustomed to be parted from her, yet my sister's grief made such an impression on me, that I ran back at once, without thinking, to my mother and begged her to leave me behind. She was much surprised; when she discovered my motive, she kissed me fondly, but said that she would not leave me on any account, that we should be back in a fortnight, and that

my sister would soon stop crying. I went sadly back to the nursery, where I found my poor sister in floods of tears. She soon had another sorrow to bear: my mother took Parasha with her, and Praskovya Ivanovna moved my sister to her own room for the time, and put her in the charge of her own favourite maid, Akulina, a very discreet and careful woman.

This unexpected visit to Kazan was arranged by Praskovya Ivanovna herself. My mother had said more than once that she would like to visit Kazan, in order to pray at the shrines of the local saints and adore the relics, which she had never seen; she wished also to be present at the Mass celebrated by the Bishop. But Praskovya Ivanovna appeared to take no notice of her words. When Epiphany, which was also my mother's birthday, came near, my mother happened to say to Alexandra, in the presence of Praskovya Ivanovna who was playing piquet with my father, that she would like very much to go away somewhere for the 6th, perhaps to Old Bagrovo.

'I detest my birthday,' she added; 'you will have a host of visitors, and it will be a real infliction to me to receive congratulations and wishes for all earthly blessings from them all.'

Praskovya Ivanovna suddenly turned round and said to my mother:

'Listen, Sofya Nikolayevna, to a plan I have thought of. You wanted to pray at the shrines of the saints of Kazan, and you don't like your birthday—nor do I like mine either—well, why don't you and Alexyéi Stepanitch take a run to Kazan? You will be back in a fortnight; the distance is only 92 versts.'

My mother accepted this suggestion very readily, and on the 3rd of January we were galloping along the road to Kazan in a fine sledge with glass windows, which Praskovya Ivanovna had given us. Though I had got a reprieve from life at Choorassovo, and was going to see for the first time a famous city of which I had heard much, yet I had no feeling of happiness; my heart was torn with grief. My dear sister, weeping bitterly with her eyes swollen, grieving for her brother and her nurse, but submitting without a word to her fate—such was the picture constantly before me; and I wept myself for a long time in a corner, paying no attention to what went on around me, and not dreaming, as I generally did, of what lay ahead of me in the future.

What did in fact lie ahead of me was the beginning of a very important episode in my life.¹

Here ends the narrative of his childhood by the young Bagroff. He asserts that his narrative, if continued, will relate, not to his childhood, but to a later stage of his youth.

¹ The episode was his entrance on school life, which is described in *A Russian Schoolboy*.

APPENDIX

THE SCARLET FLOWER

A FAIRY TALE TOLD BY PELAGÉYA, THE
HOUSEKEEPER

IN a certain kingdom, in a certain country, there lived a rich merchant, a man of great name. Much wealth had he of every kind—costly wares from far lands, pearls and precious stones, and gold and silver treasure. And this merchant had three daughters, all of them fair to see, but the youngest was the fairest of them all; and he loved his daughters more than all his riches—his pearls and precious stones and gold and silver treasure—because his wife was dead, and he had no one else to love; he loved his elder daughters, but he loved his youngest daughter best, because she was the fairest of them all and the most loving to her father. And once on a time this merchant made ready to cross the sea on the business of his merchandise; he was to cross 27 lands and travel to the 27th kingdom and the 30th country;¹ and thus he spoke to his dear daughters:

‘O daughters whom I love, daughters dear, daughters fair to see, I am going on my business as a merchant over 27 lands to the 27th kingdom and the 30th country; and whether I shall be absent a long while or a short while I know not;

¹ In Russian fairy-tales these are stock phrases for distant lands.

but I bid you to live in honesty and peace while I am far away ; and if, while I am far away, you live in honesty and peace, then I will bring you back gifts, such gifts as you yourselves shall desire. And I give you the space of three days to consider ; and then you shall tell me what gifts you desire.'

For three days and three nights they considered ; and then they came to their father, and he asked of them what gifts they desired. The eldest daughter bowed down to her father's feet, and spoke first and said :

' My lord and father that begot me, bring not for me gold or silver brocade, nor fur of the black sable, nor great pearls, but bring me, I pray, a gold crown of precious stones ; and let a light come from the stones as from the full moon or the red sun, and let the crown turn dark night into the light of day.'

The honest merchant thought awhile, and then he said :

' Daughter dear and beloved and fair to see, it is well : I will bring you a crown such as you describe. There is one I know across the sea who will procure it for me. Such a crown there is, and it belongs to a princess beyond the sea, and it is hidden in a treasure-house of stone, and the treasure-house is buried twenty feet deep in a mountain of stone, behind three iron doors and three cunning locks. The labour will not be light ; but I have a golden key to open every door.'

Then the second daughter bowed down to his feet and said :

' My lord and father that begot me, bring me no gold or silver brocade, nor black furs of the

sable of Siberia, nor necklace of great pearls, nor crown of shining gold. But bring me a mirror of crystal of the East, crystal pure and perfect, that, when I look upon it, I may see all the beauty under the sky, and such that while I look upon it I may never grow old, but my maiden beauty may increase.'

The honest merchant thought again; and when he had thought a short time or a long time, he spoke thus:

'Daughter dear and beloved and fair to see, it is well: I will bring you a crystal mirror such as you describe. Such a one there is, and it belongs to the daughter of the King of Persia, a young princess, whose beauty no tongue can tell, no pen can write, no heart can imagine; and that mirror is buried in a high tower of stone, and the tower stands on a mountain of rock, and the height of the mountain is two thousand feet; and it is hidden behind seven iron doors and seven cunning locks; and three thousand steps lead up to the tower, and on every step stands a Persian warrior day and night, holding a naked sword of Damascus steel; and the keys of those iron doors the princess carries at her girdle. There is one I know across the sea who will procure for me this mirror. This task is harder than your sister set me; but my golden key will open every door.'

Then the youngest daughter bowed down to her father's feet and said:

'My lord and father that begot me, bring me no gold or silver brocade, nor black sables of Siberia, nor necklace of great pearls, nor crown of jewels, nor mirror of crystal; but bring me the Scarlet Flower, the most beautiful thing in all the world.'

The honest merchant thought; harder he thought than before. Whether he thought a long time or a short time, I cannot tell for certain; but when he had thought, he kissed and caressed and fondled his dear youngest daughter, and thus he spoke:

‘You have set me a harder task than your sisters. When a man knows what to seek, he may surely find it; but how can he find a thing of which he is ignorant? A scarlet flower is not hard to find; but how am I to know that it is the most beautiful thing in the world? I will do my best; and be not angry if I bring not the right gift.’

And he sent away his daughters, virtuous and fair, to their maiden bowers. And he began to make ready for his journey and for his travel into far countries across the sea. Whether he took long to prepare, I know not and cannot tell: a story is quickly told, but a deed is not so quickly done. He departed on his journey and his travel; and lo! the honest merchant traversed strange countries across the sea and unknown kingdoms. He sold his own wares at a great price and bought foreign wares at a small price; he bartered merchandise for merchandise, and they gave him silver and gold into the bargain; and he loaded ships with coin of gold and sent them home. He found the magic gift for his eldest daughter, the crown with precious stones that turned dark night to the brightness of day. And he found the magic gift for his second daughter also, the crystal mirror which reflected all the beauty under the skies, and which was such that she who looked in it never grew old, but grew ever more young

and beautiful. But he could not find the magic gift for his youngest dearest daughter, the Scarlet Flower, which was the most beautiful thing in the whole world. In the gardens of tsars and kings and sultans he found many scarlet flowers, whose beauty no tongue can tell and no pen can write; but no man could give him surety that this flower was the fairest thing in the world, and he himself did not think it was so. And, as he journeyed on his way with his faithful servants over shifting sands and through sleeping forests, suddenly there fell upon him robbers, infidels were they and foul pagans, Turks, and Indians. And the honest merchant, when he saw calamity that he could not escape, left his rich caravans and his faithful servants behind, and fled into the dark forest. 'Better that wild beasts should tear me asunder, than that I should fall into the hands of heathen robbers and spend my life as their prisoner and captive!'

So he wandered in that sleeping forest, through which no man passed either walking on foot or carried by horses; and the farther he went, the better the road became, for the trees seemed to make way for him and the thick bushes to part before him. He looked back, and could not put forth his hand; he looked to the right, and the fallen trees and stumps were so thick that a hare could not have doubled between them, he looked to the left, and it was worse even than the other side. The honest merchant was astonished; he thought and thought but could not understand the marvel of what befell him; yet he walked on and on, and ever under his feet there was a beaten way. From morning till evening he

walked ; and he never heard a wild beast roar nor a serpent hiss, nor the hoot of an owl, nor the cry of any bird ; it seemed as if all was dead around him. And now dark night came on ; it was black as pitch all round, but under his feet a bright light shone. On he walked till near midnight, and he began to see a kind of glow before him ; and he thought : ' Surely the forest is on fire ; why should I go on to meet certain inevitable death ? ' He turned round, but he could not move ; he turned to the right and to the left, but nowhere could he advance ; he pushed forwards, and there was the beaten way under his feet. Then he said : ' Let me stand still awhile ; it may be that the glow will shift its place or recede from me or go out altogether. ' So he stood still and waited ; and the glow moved and seemed to advance towards him, and it grew brighter round about him. He thought and thought, and determined to go forward : a man cannot die twice, and to die once is sure for all : so the merchant crossed himself and went forward. The farther he went, the brighter grew the light till it was as bright as midday ; yet he heard no noise or crackling of fire. At last he came out upon a wide clearing in the forest ; and in the centre of the clearing there stood, not a house or a mansion, but a palace, the palace of a king or tsar, all a blaze of gold and silver and precious stones ; and it all sent forth a burning light, but there was no fire to be seen ; it was like the red sun, so that it hurt the eyes to look at it. All the windows of the palace were open ; and a concord of musical instruments, such as he had never heard, came from it. He entered a great court-

yard and great doors that were opened wide; and all the way was of white marble, and tall fountains of water, great and small, spouted at the sides of the way. He entered the palace by a staircase, of which the steps were covered with scarlet cloth and the banisters shone with gold. He went into one of the chambers, and there was no one there; he went into a second chamber, and a fifth, and a tenth, and still there was no one; but the furnishing of all was fit for an emperor, beyond aught ever seen or heard of—gold and silver, crystal of the East, ivory of the elephant and the mammoth.

The honest merchant marvelled at the untold wealth, and marvelled more that there was no owner to be seen. The music went on and never ceased. And then the merchant said to himself: 'All this is well, but there is nothing to eat.' And immediately there grew out of the ground before him a table, a table richly decked; the vessels were of gold and silver, and in them were *delicious meats and wines from across the sea* and honeyed drinks. Down he sat at the table, without fear. He had eaten nothing for twenty-four hours, and he ate and drank till he could eat no more; the food was more delicious than words can tell, tempting enough to make a man swallow his own tongue; and the merchant was ravenous with hunger, after long walking over the sands and through the forest. He rose from the table; but there was no man to whom he might do obeisance and give him thanks for his hospitality. Hardly had he risen up and looked round, when the table and all upon it vanished from his sight; and still the music went on without ceasing. The honest

merchant marvelled at such wonders and miracles ; and as he walked through the lordly chambers and marvelled at them, he thought to himself : ' It would be pleasant now to sleep and snore.' And lo ! there stood before him a bedstead carved of pure gold, with feet of crystal, and a canopy of silver, and a fringe and tassels set with pearls ; and a feather-bed like a hill lay upon it, made of soft swansdown. The merchant marvelled at this new miracle ; but he lay down upon the high bedstead, and drew the silver canopy, and saw that it was fine and soft as silk. It grew dark in the chamber, like the darkness of twilight ; and the music seemed to come from a distance ; and he thought, ' If I could see my daughters, even in a dream ! '—and that very moment he fell asleep.

When the merchant woke, the sun had risen higher than a tall tree. And when the merchant woke, he could not remember at once where he was. All night he had dreamed of his daughters dear and virtuous and beautiful ; and he saw in his dream, that his two elder daughters, the oldest daughter and the second, were merry and happy, and one only was sad, the youngest daughter whom he loved best ; and he saw that his eldest daughters had rich suitors and were making ready to be married without waiting for their father's blessing ; but the youngest daughter, the fairest and dearest, would not even hear of suitors until her dear father came home. And there was both joy and sorrow in his heart. When he rose up from the high bedstead, raiment was ready prepared for him, and a fountain of water poured into a crystal basin. He dressed and washed, and wondered no more at each new miracle. Tea and

coffee and a rich breakfast stood on a table. So he prayed and ate his breakfast, and began again to walk through the chambers, to see their beauty in the light of the red sun ; and all seemed to him even better than on the day before. He looked through the open windows and saw that round the palace there were wondrous gardens full of fruit and flowers, flowers whose beauty no pen can describe.

He longed to walk in those gardens, and he went down another staircase made of green marble and malachite with banisters of gold. He came straight down to the green gardens ; and there he walked and marvelled. For the trees were covered with fruit, ripe and red and so tempting to the taste that his mouth watered as he looked at it ; and lovely flowers blossomed, double and fragrant and bright with every colour ; and strange birds flitted about, like gold and silver displayed on green and crimson velvet, and made heavenly music ; and fountains of water spouted so high that a man could not see their full height without throwing back his head ; and springs ran and babbled in channels of crystal. The honest merchant walked and marvelled ; his eyes ran to and fro, to see such wonders ; and he knew not what to look at or what to listen to. Whether he walked a long time or a short time, I know not ; soon is a story told, but not so soon is a deed done. But suddenly he saw on a green mound a flower growing, of scarlet hue ; and its beauty was beyond the power of tongue to tell or pen to write ; no man ever saw or heard of its like. The honest merchant stopped breathing ; he drew near to the flower, and the fragrance of it like a stream filled all the garden ; and he shook in all his limbs and

cried out joyfully : ‘ This is the Scarlet Flower, the fairest thing in all the world, which my youngest dearest daughter begged of me ! ’ And when he had spoken thus, he drew near and plucked the Scarlet Flower.

That same moment, with no cloud in the sky, the lightning flashed and the thunder rolled, till the earth shook beneath his feet. And there grew up before the merchant, as if out of the ground, a creature neither beast nor man, but a monster, covered with hair and terrible to behold. And the Monster roared with a savage voice and said :

‘ What hast thou done ? How didst thou venture to pluck my favourite flower, the sacred flower in my garden ? I treasured it more than the apple of my eye, and it was my pleasure every day to behold it ; and thou hast robbed me of all my pleasure in life. I am the lord of this palace and this garden ; I received thee as a guest dear and desired, and gave thee food and drink and rest ; and for my goodness thus hast thou rewarded me ! Learn therefore thy bitter doom : for thy fault thou shalt die before thy time.’

And an echo came on every side from savage voices without number, ‘ Thou shalt die before thy time ! ’

The honest merchant’s teeth chattered for fear. He looked round, and he saw, that on every side, from under every bush and tree, from the water and from the earth, foul fiends and hideous monsters innumerable were creeping towards him. Then he fell on his knees before the chief Monster that was covered with hair all over, and spoke in a piteous voice :

‘Thou, whoever thou art, Honest Sir, Beast of the Forest, Monster of the Deep—how to address thee I know not, I cannot tell. Destroy not my life for my innocent boldness; bid me not be cut in pieces and slain; but bid me speak to thee. I have three daughters, lovely and virtuous and fair to see; and I promised to bring them each a gift—for the eldest a jewelled crown, for the second a crystal mirror, and for the youngest the Scarlet Flower, the most beautiful thing in all the world. I found the gifts for my elder daughters; but the gift for my youngest I could not find till I saw it in thy garden, the Scarlet Flower, the fairest thing in the world. And I thought that one so rich and glorious and mighty as thou art would not miss the Scarlet Flower which my dear youngest daughter had asked of me. I repent me of my fault before thy Majesty. Forgive me, if I was foolish and unwise; let me go back safe to my daughters; and, as a gift for my youngest daughter, let me have the Scarlet Flower. Whatever price thou desirest, I will pay thee in golden coin.’

A laugh like thunder echoed through the forest, and the Beast of the Forest, the Monster of the Deep made answer to the merchant:

‘What use is thy golden coin to me? I have no room to store my own. No mercy shalt thou find from me, and my faithful servants shall tear thee into little pieces. There is but one way of escape for thee. I will send thee home scatheless, I will reward thee with uncounted treasure, and I will give thee the Scarlet Flower, if thou wilt give me thy word as an honest merchant and a writing under thy hand, that thou wilt send in thy room

one of thy daughters fair and virtuous. I will do her no mischief, and she shall live in honour and freedom with me, as thou thyself didst live in my palace. I am weary of a lonely life, and I desire to get myself a companion.'

The merchant fell right down upon the damp earth, and he shed tears of anguish. He looked upon the Beast of the Forest, the Monster of the Deep, and he thought of his daughters virtuous and fair; and he cried out still louder with a voice of anguish; for the Beast of the Forest, the Monster of the Deep, was exceeding terrible to behold. Long did the honest merchant pour forth tears in his anguish; but at last he said in a pitiful voice:

'Honest Sir, Beast of the Forest, Monster of the Deep, how shall I do, if my daughters virtuous and fair will not come to thee willingly? Can I bind them hand and foot and send them to thee by force? And what way must they take to reach thy house? Two years, no more, no less, did I travel on my way here; and I know not the way I came nor the places that I passed.'

The Beast of the Forest, the Monster of the Deep, answered the merchant:

'No unwilling maiden will I have: let thy daughter come hither out of love for thee, of her own will and desire; or, if thy daughters will not come of their own will and desire, then return thyself, and I will bid thee be slain by a cruel death. And for the journey hither—it will cost thee no pains. I will give thee the ring from off my hand; and if any man put it on the little finger of his right hand, he will find himself, in the twinkling of an eye, in the place where he

wishes to be. And the space I appoint for thy sojourn at thy home is three days and three nights.'

The merchant thought; he thought hard; and this was the sum of his thoughts:

'It is better for me to see my daughters again. I will give them a father's blessing; and if they are not willing to save me from death, then I shall prepare me for death as a Christian man should, and return to the Beast of the Forest, the Monster of the Deep.'

And then, as there was no deceit in his mind, he told what was in his heart. The Beast of the Forest, the Monster of the Deep, knew his thoughts before they were spoken, and, knowing his honest heart, took no written warranty of him, but took the gold ring off his finger and gave it to the honest merchant. Hardly had the honest merchant put the ring on the little finger of his right hand, before he found himself at the entrance of his own spacious court-yard; and at that moment the entrance was filled by his rich caravans and his faithful servants, who had carried home his treasure and his merchandise, thrice as much as he had taken forth with him. A great noise arose in the house, and his daughters sprang up from their embroidery frames where they were embroidering widths of silk with silver and gold; and they began to kiss their father and embrace him and call him by many fond names; and the two elder sisters feigned greater joy than the youngest sister. They saw that their father was unhappy for some reason, and that there was a secret sorrow in his heart. And his elder daughters began to ask him whether he had lost his great riches; but

the youngest daughter thought not at all of riches, but said to her father :

‘ I have no need of your riches—riches are a thing that can be gained ; but reveal to me your heart’s sorrow.’

And the honest merchant made answer to his daughters virtuous and fair :

‘ I have not lost my great riches ; the treasure I have gained is three and four times what I had before. I have another trouble, and to-morrow I will tell you of it, but to-day we will make merry.’

He ordered his coffers bound with iron, which he took with him on his travels, to be brought in. He took out the crown of gold for his eldest daughter—gold of Araby that fire will not melt nor water rust—set with precious stones ; he took out the gift for his second daughter, the mirror of crystal of the East ; and he took out the gift for his youngest daughter, the Scarlet Flower in a golden vase. The elder daughters were beside themselves with joy and carried off their gifts to their lofty bowers, where they took their fill of delight over them at leisure. But the youngest dearest daughter, when she saw the Scarlet Flower, shook all over and began to weep, as if something had stung her heart. Then her father spoke thus to her :

‘ Daughter dear, why do you not take your flower which you desired ? It is the fairest thing in all the world.’ The youngest daughter took the Scarlet Flower, as if unwillingly, and kissed her father’s hands, but wept tears of sorrow. Soon the elder daughters hastened back ; they had tried their father’s gifts, and they were joyful exceed-

ingly. Then they sat down at tables of oak, covered with fine napery and laden with choice dishes and delicious wines; and they began to eat and to drink, to refresh themselves and make merry with loving speeches. At evening guests came; and the merchant's house was filled with guests—kinsfolk and friends, and lovers of good cheer. Till midnight the company sat and talked, and never had the honest merchant seen such an evening of feasting in his house; and he, and they all, marvelled whence all the things came, the gold and silver dishes and the wonderful meats, such as never had been seen in the house before.

Next day the merchant summoned his eldest daughter and told her, from first to last, what had befallen him, and asked her if she was willing to save him from a cruel death, and to go and live with the Beast of the Forest, the Monster of the Deep. The eldest daughter refused utterly to go, and said:

‘The daughter for whom her father got the Scarlet Flower—let *her* go and rescue her father.’

Then the honest merchant summoned his second daughter, and told her all that had befallen him, all from first to last, and asked her if she was willing to save him from a cruel death, and to go and live with the Beast of the Forest, the Monster of the Deep. But the second daughter refused utterly to go, and said:

‘The daughter for whom her father got the Scarlet Flower—let *her* go and rescue her father.’

Then the honest merchant summoned his youngest daughter and began to tell her all his tale from first to last; but, before he had time to finish his tale, the youngest daughter, whom

he loved best, fell on her knees before him and said :

‘ Give me your blessing, O my lord and father ! I will go to the Beast of the Forest, the Monster of the Deep, and live with him. It was for me you got the Scarlet Flower, and it is my duty to save you.’

The honest merchant shed tears, and embraced his youngest dearest daughter, and spoke thus to her :

‘ O my youngest and dearest daughter, darling of my heart and fair to see, may a father’s blessing rest upon you, because you are willing to save your father from a cruel death, and consent of your own free will to go to the Beast of the Forest, the Monster of the Deep, to live a terrible life with him. You will live in his palace in great wealth and freedom ; but where the palace is, no man knows nor can tell ; nor is there any way to it for man on horse, or man on foot, or bounding wild beast, or flying bird. Never will a word of tidings come from you to us, and much less from us to you. How can I live out my sad life, never seeing your face, never hearing your loving speeches ? I am parting with you for ever and ever, just as if I were burying you alive in the earth.’

And the youngest dearest daughter answered her father :

‘ Weep not ; do not grieve, O my lord and father. I shall live in wealth and freedom ; and I fear not the Beast of the Forest, the Monster of the Deep ; I will serve him truly and faithfully, and be subject to him and do his bidding ; and it may be that he will have pity on me. Do not mourn me as dead while I yet live ; it may be that God will suffer me to return to you.’

The honest merchant could not be comforted by her words, but wept and sobbed. The elder sisters came in haste and raised the sound of weeping through all the house : right sorry, forsooth, were they for their dear youngest sister. But the youngest sister showed no sign of sorrow : she neither wept nor moaned, but made ready for a far journey to a land unknown ; and she took with her the Scarlet Flower in its golden vase. Three days passed and three nights, and the time came when the honest merchant must part with his youngest daughter, his darling. He kissed her and fondled her ; his sad tears fell upon her ; he made the sign of the Cross on her and gave her a father's blessing. Then he took out from an iron-bound coffer the ring of the Beast of the Forest, the Monster of the Deep, and he put the ring on the little finger of his dear daughter's right hand—and in the same moment she vanished, herself and all that belonged to her.

She found herself in the palace of the Beast of the Forest, the Monster of the Deep, in a lofty chamber built of stone. She was lying on a bed of carven gold, with feet of crystal ; beneath her was a mattress of swansdown, and over her a golden coverlet of China silk. It was as if she had never moved, had lived there all her life, had lain down to sleep and awakened. A concord of instruments, such as she had never heard in all her days, began to play. She got up from the bed of down, and saw all her belongings and the Scarlet Flower in its golden vase, there in the room—set out on tables of green malachite. And the chamber was richly furnished with all things : there were chairs to sit on, couches to lie on,

garments to wear, and mirrors to look into. The whole of one wall was a mirror, and another was of gold, and a third all of silver, and the fourth wall was made of ivory of elephants and mammoths adorned with rubies and sapphires. And she said to herself, 'This must be my bedchamber.'

Then, desiring to see all the palace, she went forth to behold all the lofty chambers; and on she went for a long time, marvelling at all the wonders there. Each chamber was fairer than the last, and all were fairer than the honest merchant, her father, had told her. And she took the Scarlet Flower out of its golden vase, and went down into the green gardens, where the birds sang to her their heavenly notes, and the trees and bushes and flowers waved their heads and seemed to bow before her, and the fountains of water shot higher, and the springs babbled louder at her coming. And she found the high place, the grassy hillock, where the honest merchant had plucked the Scarlet Flower, the fairest thing in all the world. She took the Scarlet Flower out of its golden vase, and was about to lay it where it was before; but it flew out of her hands of its own accord, and grew on to its ancient stem, and blossomed fairer than before. Much she marvelled at such a miracle, and looked with joy at her Scarlet Flower in its beauty. Then she went back to her chambers in the palace, and in one of them there was a table laid. And she said to herself:

'Surely the Beast of the Forest, the Monster of the Deep, is not wroth with me, but will be to me a kind lord.'

Then suddenly on the wall of white marble there appeared words in letters of fire:

‘I am not thy lord but thy obedient slave. Thou art the mistress, and all that thy heart can desire I will gladly fulfil.’

She read the words in letters of fire, and they vanished instantly from the wall of white marble, as if they had never been there. Then it came into her mind to write a letter to her father and give him tidings of her. Hardly had she thought of it, when she saw a gold pen and ink and paper lying before her. And she wrote a letter to her dear father and sisters:

‘Weep not for me, neither grieve. I live like a princess in the palace of the Beast of the Forest, the Monster of the Deep. Himself I never see nor hear; but he writes to me in letters of fire on the white marble wall; and he knows all my unspoken wishes and fulfils them on the instant; and he will not be called my lord, but calls me the mistress.’

Hardly had she written the letter and sealed it with a seal, when the letter vanished out of her hands and from her sight, as if it had never been there. The music began to play louder; and dainty meats and delicious wines appeared upon the table; and all the vessels were of red gold. Though never in her life had she dined alone, she sat down cheerful at the table, and ate and drank, and refreshed herself and took pleasure in the music. After dinner, when she had eaten, she lay down to rest; and the music played more softly and farther off, that it might not hinder her from sleeping. When she had slept, she rose with a light heart and went forth again to walk in the green gardens; for, before her dinner, she had not had time to go through the half of them, or see

enough of the wonders they contained. Every tree and bush and flower bent down before her; and the ripe fruits, pears and peaches and juicy apples, seemed to desire that she would taste them. For a long time, almost till the evening, she walked to and fro in the garden. Then she returned to her lofty chambers, and there she saw a table laid, with dainty meats and delicious wines on the table, all most excellent. And after supper she went back to the chamber of white marble, where she had read the words in letters of fire; and again she saw on the wall more letters of fire that said:

‘Is my lady content with her gardens and chambers, with her entertainment and attendants?’

And the merchant’s young daughter, the lovely maiden, made answer with happy voice:

‘Call me not lady, but be thou for ever my lord, a lord kind and merciful. I will never depart from thy control; and I am grateful to thee for all my entertainment. Nothing better could be found in all the world than thy lofty chambers and thy green gardens; why then should I not be content? Never in my life have I seen such marvels; I cannot yet get over my wonder. But I fear one thing: I fear to sleep alone; in all thy lofty chambers there is not a living soul but me.’

Then out flashed the words in letters of fire on the wall:

‘Fear not, my lovely lady. Thou shalt not sleep alone; for thine own handmaid, faithful and dear, is waiting for thee. And there are many living creatures in the palace, though thou canst not see nor hear them; and they all watch over

thee, even as I do, day and night; and we will not suffer the wind to blow on thee or a grain of dust to settle upon thee.'

Then the merchant's young daughter, the lovely maiden, went to her bedchamber to sleep; and there she found her own handmaiden, faithful and dear, standing by the bed. She was half-dead with fear, but rejoiced to see her young mistress, and kissed her lily hands and clasped her nimble feet. Her mistress too rejoiced to see her, and she questioned her of her father and her elder sisters and all those who served her in her maiden home. And then she told of what had befallen herself; so that the pair of them did not sleep before white dawn.

And thus the merchant's young daughter, the lovely maiden, began to spend her life. Every day new rich dresses were ready for her, with priceless adornments which no tongue can tell nor pen describe; every day there were new entertainments and diversions. She drove through the dark woods in chariots that went without horses, to the sound of music; and the trees parted and gave her a wide smooth road to pass over. And she began to occupy herself with the handiwork of young maidens: she embroidered widths of stuff with silver and gold, and made fringes with pearls close-set; and she sent presents to her dear father; and the richest width of all she gave to her kind entertainer, even the Beast of the Forest, the Monster of the Deep; and every day she went more often to the chamber with white marble walls, that she might speak kind words to her generous entertainer and read on the wall his answers and greetings in letters of fire.

So time passed, whether much or little—soon is a story told, but not so soon is a deed done—and the merchant's young daughter, the fair maiden, became accustomed to her life: nothing surprised her or frightened her any more. She was served by invisible attendants, who ministered to her, and carried her in the chariots that went without horses, and made music for her, and performed all her commands. And she grew daily more in love with her kind lord; she saw that he loved her more than himself and had not called her his mistress for nothing; and she longed to hear his voice and speak with him without entering the chamber with marble walls or reading the words in letters of fire. She began to beg and pray for this; but the Beast of the Forest, the Monster of the Deep, would not quickly consent to her entreaties; for he feared that his voice would terrify her. But she continued to beg and beseech her kind entertainer, and he could not refuse her. So he wrote for the last time in letters of fire on the marble wall:

‘Come to-day into the green garden; sit down in thy favourite bower that is hedged about with leaves and branches and flowers; and say these words: “Speak with me, my faithful slave.”’

The merchant's young daughter, the lovely maiden, let no time pass: down she ran into the green gardens, and went into her favourite bower, hedged about with leaves and branches and flowers; and she sat down on the bench covered with brocade. She was panting, and her heart beat like the heart of a little bird you hold in your hand; but she spoke thus:

‘Fear not, my kind and gracious lord, to terrify

me with thy voice. After all thy kindnesses, even the roaring of a wild beast would not terrify me. Speak to me, and fear not !'

She heard a sound of some one sighing behind the bower, and a voice arose, a terrible voice, savage and untuneable, gruff and hoarse, though it was speaking low as yet. And the merchant's young daughter, the lovely maiden, shuddered at first when she heard the voice of the Beast of the Forest, the Monster of the Deep ; but she mastered her fear and showed no sign of it ; and soon she began to listen to his kindly words and his wise speeches, and her heart grew light.

After that time there was constant talk between them, nearly the whole day, as they walked in the green gardens or drove through the dark woods, and in all the lofty chambers of the palace. The merchant's young daughter, the lovely maiden, would call out :

' Art thou here, my dear kind lord ? ' And the Beast of the Forest, the Monster of the Deep, would answer :

' Here, my fair lady, is thy faithful slave, thy unchanging friend.' She had no fear of his savage and terrible voice, and they talked as friends to each other without end.

And time passed, whether a short time or a long time—soon is a story told, but not so soon is a thing done—and the merchant's young daughter, the lovely maiden, longed to see with her own eyes the Beast of the Forest, the Monster of the Deep ; but for long he would not consent ; for he feared to terrify her. And he was indeed terrible to behold, beyond the power of any tongue to tell or pen to write : not men only but wild beasts,

whenever they beheld him, were terrified and slunk away to their dens. And the Beast of the Forest, the Monster of the Deep, spoke thus:

‘ Beg me not, O lovely lady and delight of my eyes, to show thee my terrible face and my deformed body. To my voice thou art now accustomed; we live in friendship and concord; scarcely do we part one from another; and thou lovest me for my unspeakable love to thee. But when thou seest all my hideous deformity, thou wilt hate unhappy me, and drive me from thy sight; and I shall die of grief when parted from thee.’

But the merchant’s young daughter, the lovely maiden, would not hearken to his words. She entreated him more earnestly than before, and she vowed and swore that no extreme of deformity would terrify her, and that she would never cease to love her kind lord; and she spoke to him thus:

‘ If thou art old, be my grandfather; if thou art of middle age, be my uncle; but if thou art young, be as my brother to me; and while I live, be thou the friend of my heart.’

Long, long did the Beast of the Forest, the Monster of the Deep, hold out against her prayer; but he could not withstand the entreaties and tears of his lovely lady, and at last he said:

‘ I cannot gainsay thee. Because I love thee more than myself, I will grant thy desire, although I know that I shall destroy my happiness and die an untimely death. Go down into the green garden in the grey twilight, when the red sun is setting behind the forest, and say: “ Show thyself to me, faithful friend ! ”—and I will show thee my hideous face and my deformed body. And if it is im-

possible for thee to stay longer with me, I will put no force on thee, nor would I have thee suffer without end: thou wilt find in thy bedchamber, beneath thy pillow, the gold ring from off my finger. Put it on the little finger of thy right hand, and thou wilt find thyself in thy father's house; and never more shalt thou hear aught of me'

The merchant's young daughter, the lovely maiden, had strong confidence in herself; she was not alarmed or afraid. At once, without delaying a moment, she went into the green garden to await the appointed hour; and when grey twilight came and the red sun was sinking behind the forest, she said aloud:

'Show thyself to me, my faithful friend.'

And the Beast of the Forest, the Monster of the Deep, appeared to her at a distance; he only walked across the path and was lost in the thick bushes. But when the merchant's young daughter, the lovely maiden, saw him, she struck her lily hands together, and cried out in a voice of anguish, and fell senseless on the path. For terrible indeed he was, the Beast of the Forest, the Monster of the Deep. His arms were crooked, and his fingers were like a wild beast's talons; he had the legs of a horse, and great humps like a camel's before and behind; he was covered with hair from head to foot; tusks like a wild boar's stuck out of his mouth; his nose was curved like an eagle's beak, and he had the eyes of an owl. The merchant's young daughter, the lovely maiden, lay there a long time or a short time; and when she came to herself she heard some one near her weeping tears of anguish and crying with a sorrowful voice:

'Thou hast destroyed me, my beautiful darling:

no more shall I see thy fair face ; no longer wilt thou be willing even to hear my voice ; and I must die an untimely death.'

And she was sorry and ashamed, and she mastered her great fear and timid maiden heart and spoke with a firm voice .

' Fear nothing, my kind and gentle lord ; I will never again fear thy terrible shape, I will never part with thee or forget thy kindnesses. Show thyself to me now in thy former shape ; only because it was the first time, I was afraid.'

And the Beast of the Forest, the Monster of the Deep, showed himself to her in his terrible shape so hideous and deformed ; but he did not venture to come close to her, however much she called him. And they walked together till dark night came, and talked as before with love and wisdom, and the merchant's young daughter, the lovely maiden, felt no fear. Next day she saw the Beast of the Forest, the Monster of the Deep, by the light of the red sun ; and though she was frightened at first to look upon him, she gave no sign of it, and soon her fear passed away altogether. And now they conversed together more than ever : they hardly parted the whole day long ; at dinner and supper they took their fill of dainty meats and refreshed themselves with delicious wines ; they walked in the green gardens, and drove through the dark woods in the chariots that ran without horses. And time not a little passed by : soon is a story told, but not so quickly does a thing happen. And one night, in her sleep, the merchant's young daughter, the fair maiden, dreamed that her father was lying sick ; and constant grief took hold of her. And the Beast of the Forest, the Monster of the

Deep, saw her in her grief and tears, and was sore distressed, and asked her the reason of her grief and tears. And she told him of her evil dream, and asked him to suffer her to visit her father and her dear sisters. And the Beast of the Forest, the Monster of the Deep, answered her :

‘What need hast thou of my permission? Thou hast my gold ring : put it on the little finger of thy right hand, and thou wilt find thyself in thy father’s house. Remain there till thou art weary, and this only will I say to thee : if thou dost not return at the end of three days and three nights, that will end my life, and I shall die in that instant, because I love thee better than myself and cannot live without thee.’

Then she began to assure him, with solemn words and oaths and vows, that she would return to his high palace one hour exactly before the three days and three nights expired. She said farewell to her gentle and kind entertainer, and put the gold ring on the little finger of her right hand, and found herself standing in the wide court-yard of the honest merchant, her father.

She went up the high steps of his mansion of stone ; and all the attendants and servants of the house hastened towards her with a noise and shouting ; and her dear sisters ran to meet her, and, when they saw her, marvelled at her maiden beauty and her royal apparel. Then they took her by her lily hands, and led her to her father ; and her father was lying sick—sick and sad, as he thought of her day and night and shed tears of anguish. Exceeding glad was he when he saw his youngest daughter whom he loved best, dear and virtuous and fair to see ; and he marvelled at her

maiden beauty and her royal apparel. For long they kissed and caressed one another, and comforted their hearts with loving words. Then she told her father and her sisters of her manner of life with the Beast of the Forest, the Monster of the Deep; she told them all from first to last, not hiding a single crumb; and the honest merchant rejoiced to hear of the splendour in which she lived, like a queen or empress; and he marvelled that she had become accustomed to the sight of her terrible host, and had no fear of the Beast of the Forest, the Monster of the Deep; he himself, at the mere thought of him, trembled and shook. But the elder sisters, when they heard of the boundless wealth of the youngest sister, and of her power over her lord as if she were a queen and he her slave, became jealous of her.

That day passed like one hour, and the second day passed like one minute; and on the third day the elder sisters began to persuade the youngest sister not to return to the Beast of the Forest, the Monster of the Deep: 'Even let him die, as he deserves,' said they. But their guest, the youngest sister, was angry with the elder sisters and spoke to them thus:

'My lord is kind and gentle; and if I repay him by a cruel death for all his goodness and his love unspeakable, then I shall not be worthy to look on the light of day, and I should be given to wild beasts to tear.'

Her father, the honest merchant, praised her for having spoken well; and it was determined that the youngest dearest daughter, virtuous and fair, should return one hour before the appointed time to the Beast of the Forest, the Monster of the Deep.

But the sisters were angry at it, and they devised a cunning plan, a cunning and a wicked device : they put back by a whole hour all the clocks in the house ; and the honest merchant did not see it, nor any of the faithful servants that waited in his house. And when the right hour came, the merchant's young daughter, the lovely maiden, felt pain and trouble, as if something were pulling at her heart, and she looked constantly at the clocks in her father's house, clocks from Germany and clocks from England—and still it was too early to start on her far journey ; and her sisters talked with her of this and that, and detained her. But at last she could bear it no longer : she said farewell to the honest merchant, her father, and received from him a father's blessing ; she said farewell to her dear elder sisters, and to the faithful servants and attendants. Then, one minute before the hour appointed, she put the gold ring on the little finger of her right hand, and found herself standing in the palace of white marble, in the lofty palace of the Beast of the Forest, the Monster of the Deep. .

She wondered that he did not come to meet her, and she cried out in a loud voice :

' Where art thou, my kind lord, my faithful friend ? Why dost thou not meet me ? I returned earlier than the appointed time by a whole hour and one minute.'

None answered, none hailed her ; there was dead silence all around ; in the green gardens the heavenly notes of the birds were silent, the fountains had ceased to spout, and the springs made no noise ; and there was no sound of music in the lofty palace. The merchant's daughter, the lovely maiden, felt her heart tremble, and was

aware of coming trouble ; she ran through the lofty chambers and the green gardens, and called her kind host with a voice of anguish ; but nowhere was there any answer or greeting or voice of any that replied. Then she ran to the grassy hillock, where grew in beauty her Scarlet Flower ; and she saw the Beast of the Forest, the Monster of the Deep, lying there on the hillock and clasping the Scarlet Flower in his paw-like arms. She thought that he had gone to sleep while waiting for her, and was now sound asleep. The merchant's daughter, the lovely maiden, began to wake him gently, but he did not answer ; then she began to wake him more roughly, and caught hold of his shaggy paw ; and she saw that the Beast of the Forest, the Monster of the Deep, was lying like a dead corpse on the ground.

Her clear eyes grew dark ; her nimble feet gave way beneath her ; she put her white arms round the head of her dear lord, that hideous horrible head, and cried out in a voice of anguish :

' Arise, awake, O friend of my heart ! I love thee as the bride loves the bridegroom, dear and desired ! '

Hardly had she spoken these words, when the lightning flashed from every side, and the earth shook with a great crash of thunder, and the stone arrow of the thunder struck the grassy hillock ; and the merchant's young daughter, the fair maiden, fell senseless on the ground.

Whether she lay senseless a long time or a short time, I cannot tell. But when she became conscious, she was sitting on a golden throne set with precious stones in a lofty hall of white marble ; and a prince, young and lovely, held her in his

arms; and he was robed in cloth of gold, and wore a kingly crown on his head. And before her stood her father and her sisters; and round them were kneeling a throng of courtiers, all apparelled in brocade of gold and silver. And the lovely young prince with the royal crown upon his head spoke thus to her:

‘My beauty and my darling, thou didst love me in the form of a hideous monster, for my kind heart and the love I bore thee. Then love me now when I wear human shape, and be my bride. A wicked witch was wroth with my father, who, while he yet lived, was a glorious and mighty king; she stole me away while I was still a child, and by her foul arts and devilish enchantments turned me into a hideous monster, and laid a spell upon me, that I should live in that hideous form, a terror to every man and even to the beasts God made, until a fair maiden should be found, whatever were her birth or condition, who would love me in my monstrous shape and desire to be my wedded wife. Then the spell would come to an end, and I should get back my human shape, and be young and fair to see. Full thirty years I lived a monster and a terror; and I enticed to my enchanted palace eleven fair maidens, and thou wert the twelfth. Not one of them loved me in return for my kindness and good treatment of them, or for my kind heart. Thou alone didst love me, a hideous and horrible monster, in return for my kindness and good treatment of thee, and for my kind heart, and for my exceeding love to thee; and therefore thou shalt be the bride of a glorious king, the queen over a mighty kingdom.’

Then all were astonished, and the courtiers

bowed down to the ground. The honest merchant gave his blessing to his dear youngest daughter and to the young prince. And the envious elder sisters and all the faithful servants, and all the great nobles and brave warriors, wished joy to the bridegroom and the bride. And they began at once to make merry ; and soon came the wedding ; and they lived happily ever afterwards.

I was at the wedding myself, and drank beer and mead ; but it all ran down my chin and none went down my throat.¹

¹ This seems to be a stock ending to a Russian fairy-story. I suppose it implies that, as the feast was a Barmecide feast, so all the narrative must be regarded as fictitious.



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